



STRENGTHENING POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

EDITORS

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● PREFACE

Since 1996 the number of students enrolled for Master's study in South Africa has more than doubled, while doctoral enrolments have almost tripled (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2015). Such enormous growth has had major implications for supervision, especially in a context where only 39% of academics have doctorates themselves. If South Africa is to come close to the National Development Plan target of 5 000 doctoral graduates per year by 2030, the pressure on supervisors is likely to continue apace. But supervision is of course not simply a matter of applying technical skills to churn out highly competent postgraduate scholars. It is a teaching craft coupled with research acumen and deep personal commitment. This book reflects on how a range of supervisors are making sense of this complex endeavour.

The *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* book brings together 15 chapters written by 18 academics from 16 disciplines in 11 institutions. The authors work across all three institutional types found in higher education in South Africa: traditional universities, comprehensive universities and universities of technology. Through this rich array of contributions, supervision is presented never as a 'best practice' to be generically implemented but rather as a nuanced pedagogy to be nurtured through critical reflection.

The chapters mix theoretical considerations of the postgraduate process and personal narratives of supervision practice. Most of the authors can be described as emerging supervisors, with a few contributions from more experienced supervisors, but all have in common a deep desire to forge inclusive environments that foster meaningful postgraduate research and nurture a new generation of scholars. It is through the sharing of these academics' concerns and constraints, competencies and celebrations that this book adds to our understanding of postgraduate supervision in South Africa.

THE BOOK DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This book emerges from the national *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course (www.postgraduatesupervision.com). At the time of writing, the course has been offered 45 times at 20 different universities in South Africa. This collaborative initiative began with funding from the Dutch Government, through EP-Nuffic, and was extended through a collaborative Teaching Development Grant from the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa.

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The *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course set out to contest the notion that postgraduate supervision is a fairly unproblematic extension of the supervisor's own research. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework indicates that one of the outcomes of the doctorate is that the 'graduate should be able to supervise and evaluate the research of others in the area of specialisation concerned' (2013: 40). But it is rare for the doctorate to include explicit induction into the practice of supervision and so many graduates find themselves simply relying on duplicating their own supervisor's good practices and trying to avoid their poor ones.

The *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course conceptualises supervision as sitting at the teaching-research nexus and requiring supervisors to develop a strong scholarly identity of their own, a capacity to critically reflect on their supervision practice and, especially in the South African context, to have an understanding of pedagogy as part of the social justice project. Postgraduate education in South Africa is partly funded as a 'research output', but it is also funded as a 'teaching input', which speaks to its pedagogical aspects. It was from the understanding that the practice of supervision is not simple and that novice supervisors need spaces of support and development that the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course was born.

The course encompasses four themes: social justice in supervision, the importance of scholarship, supervision processes, and supervision practices. It runs over six months in a combination of face-to-face workshops and online tasks and discussions. The idea of the course was to provide a space for supervisors to come together within their institutions and reflect on supervision. Though the course is structured with clear tasks and an abundance of materials, there was an explicit desire to avoid the one-size-fits-all approach to staff development. The course sought to acknowledge the ways in which disciplinary differences and institutional norms constrain and enable approaches to supervision (Motshoane and McKenna, 2014) and to be adaptable to the needs of each cohort. We thus sought to make space for the participants in the course to adjust the programme to cater to the needs of their own contexts.

Though the course is far longer and more adaptable than most once-off workshops on supervision, it needs to be acknowledged that it cannot provide the kinds of ongoing support needed by supervisors. It is thus rewarding to read, in the chapters of this book, of the many ways in which course participants have extended the course into ongoing initiatives. The *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course belongs to no particular individual or institution. All materials are licensed under Creative Commons to allow anyone to freely adapt and use the materials. It is out of this

collaborative and collegial approach to the course that we are now able to celebrate the development of this collection of reflections on supervision.

The reflective essays written as the assessment for the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course offer a unique insight into postgraduate supervision and include voices of those who generally do not write about their pedagogical practices. It was from such essays that the chapters for this book were solicited. The contributors to this book were supported through a series of feedback rounds to produce the rich insights captured here.

THE BOOK STRUCTURE

The book begins with a chapter by Chrissie Boughey, Harry Wels and Henk van den Heuvel. Chrissie, Harry and Henk make up the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* management team along with Sioux McKenna and Jenny Clarence. Their chapter provides us with the 'big picture' about the role that postgraduate education plays in our country. This chapter looks at the ways in which higher education policy, past and present, have shaped our sector and the implications thereof for postgraduate education. With Chapter One having set the scene, the book moves on to a further fourteen chapters offering unique perspectives on the postgraduate journey. These have been loosely grouped into four sections.

The first four chapters look at social inclusion as a goal of postgraduate education. These chapters focus largely on personal experiences and the ways in which our approach to supervision can serve to make spaces for development or serve to marginalise our students. In Chapter Two, Audrey Msimanga draws on the work of Boyer to look at the development of a scholarly identity through three different experiences. She uses her own lens as a doctoral student, and then as an emerging supervisor and lastly, she looks at supervision from the perspective of an experienced senior professor. In Chapter Three, Carla Tsamparis provides an engaging and lively consideration of the multiple challenges presented by postgraduate supervision which sit at the 'chaotic' intersection of personal and professional identities. She looks at the ways in which the increased managerialism of our institutions compounds the roles required of the postgraduate supervisor. In Chapter Four Berrington Ntombela offers a consideration of the multiple roles required of postgraduate supervisors which include a critical view of the institutional construction and reconstruction of supervisors. The focus of Chapter Five is on the central importance of ensuring socially just supervision practices. In this personal account Mamalatswa Maruma acknowledges the damaging consequences of exclusionary supervisory practice as it applies to a range of factors including language, age, gender and nationality. She

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then offers an insightful reflection on the all-important process of countering such practices and supervising towards social inclusion.

The next three chapters shift the focus to various approaches to supervision and provide us with a critical challenge to avoid simply reproducing dominant modes of supervision. Chapter Six offers a feminist perspective for emancipatory supervision. Here Rob Baum provides a strong critique of the hierarchically structured apprenticeship model and argues for an alternative construction where the supervisory relationship is based on a Socratic approach with respect and collaboration at its centre. In Chapter Seven Theresa Edlmann illustrates how she uses narrative theory as a theoretical framework for the supervision process. Of particular interest is her contention that narrative-based supervision can offer the supervisor a form of what she calls “scholarly activism”. In Chapter Eight Gillian Eagle turns our attention to the role of the student in the supervision relationship. Bringing a psychological perspective, she argues that too little attention has been paid to the role of the student in shaping the supervisory relational dynamic and considers the strategies that can be used by students to control and at times manipulate the supervision relationship. She also suggests some possible coping mechanisms and strategies for supervisors in response to this.

In the next four chapters of the book, the authors all draw on the norms and values of their relevant disciplines to discuss the enablements and constraints of postgraduate supervision. In this way the book clearly demonstrates the ways in which disciplinary norms affect approaches to supervision. While this understanding helps us to avoid ‘one size fits all’ approaches to supervision, it also allows us to reflect on the range of approaches used across disciplines and to critically reflect on our own inherited approaches.

Chapter Nine is written by Shalini Singh who, in the context of low supervision capacity in a University of Technology, has often been required to supervise postgraduate students outside of her own discipline. Having considered the many disadvantages of supervising across disciplines, her chapter presents a strong argument in favour of situating oneself within a community of practice with a strong research focus. In Chapter Ten Heidi Saayman-Hattingh describes the challenges facing a novice supervisor working within Visual Studies, a discipline which is traditionally associated with practical application rather than research. She then considers a range of supportive interventions, including institutional initiatives, supervision training and networking through conferences, which have the potential to facilitate and enhance the development of a scholarly identity. Chapter Eleven offers Kirsten Krauss’ argument that the key tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis can be beneficially used

by supervisors, in this case in Information Systems, to facilitate the acquisition of disciplinary discursive practice in an explicit and mutually respectful way. In Chapter Twelve, Riekie van Aswegen views the postgraduate supervision process through the lens of a music educator and maps ten steps in the development of a choral group onto those of the supervision process. Drawing on the theory of Transformative Learning, she argues that both choral education and supervisory practices have the potential to act as change agents in shaping cultural identities and enhancing cross-cultural understanding.

The final three chapters of the book look closely at the ways in which institutional contexts have a bearing on postgraduate supervision. Chapter Thirteen adds yet another perspective on the supervision process as Dumsile Hlengwa considers the value and role of postgraduate supervision training, most particularly in the context of a relatively young university in which the capacity and confidence to supervise is limited. In Chapter Fourteen Andrew Swarts argues that regardless of the model of supervision, it is possible to integrate supervisory practices that can be considered to be 'nurturing and inspiring' and which, among other things, require ongoing self-reflection and critique on the part of the supervisor. In Chapter Fifteen, the concluding chapter of the book, Ronel Steyn and Susan van Schalkwyk look back at the preceding chapters and move away from personal perspectives to institutional contexts. They consider the extent to which initiatives designed to develop supervision practice, such as the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course, have the potential to impact on the way in which supervision is perceived and positioned within the institution. They provide a strong argument for more ongoing and integrated spaces for the development of this unique form of pedagogy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book arises out of an ongoing collaboration between multiple people. We wish to acknowledge all the project partners who developed the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course from which this book emerges: University of Fort Hare, University of Stellenbosch, University of Cape Town, University of Venda, Erasmus University, Rhodes University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. We would like to especially mention Gideon de Wet and Susan van Schalkwyk who assisted with the initial conceptualisation of the book, and Nomfundo Siqwede who managed the administration of the project. The course from which this book emerges has been skilfully facilitated by a large number of experienced supervisors across South Africa and the Netherlands and any success the course has had is largely due to them. We are enormously grateful to EP-Nuffic and the DHET for the funds to develop and offer

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the course. This funding has allowed us to build a large inter-institutional initiative that continues to grow and which is increasingly being adapted by institutions to be offered internally. We are grateful to Vicki Igglesden for her skilful assistance with the editing. Her experience of postgraduate writing support across disciplines and her own research and writing on human rights, social justice and education provided the ideal background for engaging with this project. And, of course, we are most grateful to the authors of the chapters who have participated with us in this project and who have been so willing to share their own journeys and insights.

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LISTENING TO OUR CONTEXTS

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The supervision of postgraduate research can be a particularly challenging form of teaching in any context, as the vast literature on postgraduate education reveals (see for instance Motshoane and McKenna, 2014). The journey towards the production of a thesis or dissertation is a lengthy one and involves not only the meeting of two minds in pursuit of an intellectual project but also the coming together of two individuals who may also have very different modes of engaging with others based on their own personal characteristics and preferences as well as on social and cultural differences (Moses 1984). When that journey is undertaken in a context marked by social difference and inequality and where, at the same time, the rewards related to the journey are 'high stakes', then supervision becomes even more difficult to negotiate for both students and academics. For students, obtaining the degree is of utmost importance; for supervisors, academic reputation, performance in terms of outputs (numbers of graduates) and financial incentives are often at stake.

The supervision explored in this book all took place in South Africa, a context which continues to be marked by great inequities at many levels in the higher education system. In 1994, the newly elected democratic government inherited a system fractured along numerous lines. One of the first fractures related to social group with institutions of higher education designated for black, white, Coloured and Indian students. Sometimes institutions were separated only by a fence but differences in the allocation of funding meant that those intended for white social groups were often of a completely different order to their sister institutions intended for black students. A second divide related to distinctions between universities and technikons, the latter being vocationally oriented institutions generally focusing on diploma-level

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programmes with the former offering mainly professional and formative degrees. Geographical location also played a part in shaping the character of an institution with some located in deeply rural areas whilst others, generally those intended for white social groups, were to be found in choice positions in the largest cities. A final major divide was that of the language of learning and teaching. Under apartheid both English and Afrikaans were used as languages of learning and teaching in higher education, a practice which required the conscious development of Afrikaans as an academic language. These linguistic differences contributed to social, cultural and political differences in both staff and student bodies.

These fractures led to enormous disparities in the conditions for research and postgraduate supervision. Essentially, the historically black institutions were established to produce workers for the apartheid regime – teachers, nurses, civil servants and public administrators. The programmes they offered were not intended to develop critical thought, although black institutions were indeed rich sources of intellectualism, a phenomenon that developed in spite of the attempts of the apartheid planners to control criticality. The funding allocated to black universities was not sufficient to support research and postgraduate study, however, with the result that capacity to conduct research was not developed in a consistent manner. Libraries were ill stocked, laboratory facilities were badly resourced and the structures necessary to support black researchers' pursuit for funding were generally absent. To a small extent, the technikons were funded for research provided this was applied and had a demonstrable use value. Historically white universities, on the other hand, were resourced for research and, over the apartheid era, built capacity across the disciplines which has served them well in the years since the shift to democracy.

POLICY POST 1994 AND ITS IMPACTS

From 1994 onwards, a wealth of policy work was directed at the 'transformation' of higher education in order to develop a system which would provide quality education for all. Early policy documents (see, for example, the National Commission for Higher Education, 1996) identified 'massification' as a strategy to achieve greater equity. In 1994, headcounts at all South African institutions of higher education numbered just over 500 000 students with 70% of these in institutions designated 'universities' and the remaining 30% in technikons (Cooper and Subotsky, 2001:12). As might be expected in a country emerging from an iniquitous regime, participation rates of the different social groups were also heavily skewed in favour of white students.

In the years since the first democratic election, headcounts have doubled without a concomitant improvement in the participation rates of black students. By 2013,

participation rates of the 18- to 24-year-old cohort stood at 16% for black African students and 15% for Coloured students in comparison to 49% for Indian and 55% for white students respectively (CHE, 2013). Since 2007, a number of cohort analyses have problematised these participation rates even further showing that, regardless of the institution at which they are enrolled, the programme of study (i.e. diploma or degree) or the subject area, black students fare less well across the board in comparison to their white counterparts in terms of success, graduation and throughput rates (see, for example, Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007; CHE, 2013). The impact of poor performance data on postgraduate study is not hard to identify. Not only are black South Africans less likely to access higher education, they are also less likely to graduate, to graduate well and, thus, to proceed to do postgraduate work.

Close analysis shows differences in the choices made by black student as they entered higher education. From 1994, all institutions, regardless of their former designation, were open to students from all social groups. As Cooper and Subotsky's (2001) work has shown, as institutions of higher education opened their doors to all in the 1990s, black students' preferences for vocational, 'work-ready' qualifications, perceived to provide access to the material wealth long denied to black social groups, saw large numbers seeking enrolments in the technikons as opposed to the traditional universities. Black students with scores on the school-leaving examinations which allowed entrance to the historically white institutions abandoned those historically designated for their social groups. The late 1990s, therefore, saw many historically black institutions, and particularly the traditional universities located in rural areas, suffering steep falls in enrolments which then impacted on their finances and, significantly, their morale. These trends have continued to this day although the deterioration of the school system since 1994 has seen many black students only achieving a level of performance on the school-leaving examination which will allow them access to diploma- rather than degree-level study.

As the historically white institutions have sought to 'transform' following the shift to democracy (see for instance Kamsteeg, 2011), the need to change the demographics of the academic staff as well as the student body has been high on the agenda. The demand for black academics, and particularly academics with sound research profiles, far outstrips supply and it has become commonplace for highly resourced institutions to 'poach' intellectuals from less well-resourced institutions. Such 'poaching' does not only involve the offer of higher salaries but also resources for these individuals to continue to build and strengthen their research capacity. This phenomenon is fostered by higher education funding policies which are 'incentive

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driven' (MoE, 2004) and which reward institutions for research outputs counted in the form of units.

One of the most obvious results of these funding policies has been the placement of key agents responsible for driving a research agenda at institutional level, not necessarily for intellectual gains, but for the financial gains which accrue from 'increasing productivity'. As Deputy Vice Chancellors and Deans for research and development have been appointed at institutions across the system, so too have structures been established in order to drive research productivity and development. These structures include research offices and research policies which, more often than not, reward individuals financially for research outputs. As a result, discourses privileging research have strengthened at South African universities in the last 10 to 15 years because of funding policies. At the same time, efforts to improve teaching and learning at undergraduate level have not borne fruit, as the cohort analyses indicated above have shown. All this means that access to postgraduate education continues to be skewed by the performance of the system, a phenomenon which is then exacerbated by the need for many black graduates to move into the world of work upon completing their undergraduate qualifications in order to earn income to support their families who often continue to be afflicted by dire poverty. This then means that the demographics of those involved in postgraduate study do not reflect those of the general population. All this has profound implications for supervision and, in particular, for the need for black South Africans who do succeed in climbing the academic ladder to be supported as they strive to complete postgraduate qualifications.

Yet more developments in the policy arena have impacted on the skewed character of postgraduate provision in South Africa. In the early 2000s, a massive project intended to reform the entire system was undertaken thanks to the development of the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001a). This process saw the identification of three 'institutional types': the traditional university, the university of technology developed from the former technikon, and the comprehensive university intended to offer a mix of traditional academic and vocational programmes. This 'sizing and shaping' of the South African higher education system in an effort to bring about greater equity saw a reduction in the total number of institutions from 36 to 23 through a series of mergers and incorporations (DoE, 2001b), although, as we have already shown, enrolments have grown.

The identification of institutional types in the National Plan was then fostered by a quality assurance project (CHE, 2002) which, in drawing on the notion of quality as 'fitness for and of purpose' encouraged institutions to identify an institutional niche

for themselves (i.e. a purpose) which could then be driven by internal arrangements for quality assurance. Initial attempts to 'size and shape' the system had included a plan for some institutions to be focused on undergraduate teaching with only limited capacity for research and postgraduate study (DoE, 2001a). This was, however, resisted across the sector in the name of equality and, as we have indicated above, countered by a new funding formula (DoE, 2004) which provided substantial financial rewards for research outputs in the form of subsidy for postgraduate graduations and publications. To all intents and purposes, therefore, all South African universities have sought to develop research capacity since the early 2000s with varying degrees of success.

Other policy work has focused on the development of a Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (MoE, 2012), which went through many reiterations before its finalisation in 2012. The qualification framework is mentioned here not only because it attempts to delineate the development of research capacity by specifying a research component in qualifications from the Honours degree upwards, but also because of the inclusion of 'professional' qualifications at master's and doctoral levels. The acknowledgement of these qualifications signifies more than a formal qualifications type since it is recognition of the existence of different 'knowledge types'. These knowledge types, identified, for example, in the work of British sociologist Basil Bernstein (see, for example, 1999) and others (see, for example, Gamble, 2003, 2006), include 'applied' knowledge and 'professional knowledge'. Given the focus on the production of knowledge in postgraduate research, clearly this has implications for supervision. One account of 'applied knowledge' (Layton, 1993 cited in Gamble, 2006), for example, describes its production as resulting from reflection on theoretical knowledge as attempts are made to apply it in context. As will be seen from a perusal of the mission and vision statements of South African universities, the universities of technology and, to some extent, the comprehensive universities have taken up the idea of 'applied knowledge' with some enthusiasm. This clearly has implications for supervision which is contextually sensitive and for supervisors who can draw on a range of methodologies and approaches to research. If applied knowledge does indeed result from reflection on theoretical knowledge in practice, the research methodologies would need to incorporate a reflective component.

One final impact of shifts following the advent of democracy relates to the academic workforce. The need for universities to transform their staff profiles and the resulting competition to attract black academics with research profiles has already been noted earlier in this chapter. While black academics are in heavy demand, recruitment of

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a 'new generation' of academics has not matched growth in the higher education sector. Many established researchers and supervisors are now approaching the end of their working lives and questions about who is to replace them are becoming urgent. The need for individuals who have completed postgraduate work as academics is greater than ever but, even more pertinently, there is a need for those individuals to represent the greater demographics of the country. At the same time, the academic workplace has become less attractive to many as remuneration does not match what can be offered elsewhere while the demands on academics to perform all of the areas of scholarship identified by Boyer (1990) as well as to contribute to the running of their departments are perceived to be increasingly demanding.

The HEQSF noted earlier identifies the ability to supervise postgraduate research as one of the outcomes of a doctoral-level qualification. The assumption therefore seems to be that one can learn how to supervise simply by being supervised, a claim that those involved in the project underpinning this book, and described in the Foreword, would dispute most strongly. However, as the project has shown, it is not only the availability of formal courses intended to develop supervisory capacity that allow for quality supervision (McKenna and Boughey, 2014).

THE CONTEMPORARY POSTGRADUATE ARENA AND SUPERVISION

We began this chapter by stating that postgraduate supervision is a challenging form of teaching in any context and that it could be particularly difficult in contexts marked by disparities. Our account of the South African higher education system and the impact of policy on it since 1994 now lead us to the postgraduate arena, to a discussion of the inequalities by which it continues to be marked and the way these impact on postgraduate supervision.

Earlier in this chapter we noted the way historical inequities impacted on the capacity to engage with research in the different kinds of institutions under apartheid. To recap, the historically white universities were funded for research and encouraged to engage with it. This was not the case for the historically black universities. This impacted on the 'research cultures' and structures which developed in these different kinds of institutions, both of which were built over decades and sustained through practice. While policy since 1994 has attempted to promote research across all universities through financial incentives, this has not necessarily impacted on the development of research communities that can sustain and encourage research, researchers and, thus, supervisors of postgraduate work. An individual academic working in a historically white university would be likely to find herself immersed in a rich research culture where seminars, discussions and other fora all promoted

intellectual engagement across a wide range of topics both within and without her own disciplinary area and specific research interest. The same academic might find herself serving on well-functioning higher degrees or ethical standards committees as a result of which she would read a large number of proposals to conduct research and would be guided by the discussions that took place in committee meetings to a deeper understanding of research methodologies and research issues. If the individual was a more junior member of staff, she might be mentored by her more experienced peers and could even be part of a cohort of junior researchers receiving funding and support to develop her own research trajectory and postgraduate programme. Her initial experiences of supervision might be of co-supervision where she would be inducted into supervisory practice by a peer.

Even in such research-rich contexts, however, a supervisor is likely to encounter challenges. Those students who present themselves for supervision and who are judged to be 'ready' or 'postgraduate material', might be drawn from particular social groups rather than represent the entire spectrum of diversity in South African higher education. Although support for supervision is available, those offering this support might only draw on experience of supervising particular kinds of students.

This experience might not be mirrored in other kinds of institutions, particularly the historically black universities and the universities of technology where efforts to establish or enhance research cultures are still in their infancy thanks to the efforts of newly appointed agents and newly developed structures intended to foster research. In such contexts, an academic might find that she is a 'lone' researcher or supervisor left to make decisions without the support of peers. She might be one of the few individuals within a department or subject area with a doctorate and thus her supervision load will be enormous regardless of her experience.

We have referred to the notion of 'research culture' several times in this chapter but institutional value and belief systems do not only impact on research. The historically white English-speaking liberal universities prized academic freedom and institutional autonomy throughout the years of apartheid and the liberties they guarded during this time survive to this day. This was not the case for the historically black institutions or the technikons which were both subject to much stronger control from the apartheid government, or for the Afrikaans-speaking historically white universities which, ideologically, were more disposed to control by a governance structure which supported apartheid. This historical conditioning impacts on management and governance in the different kinds of universities to this day. Culturally, some universities are disposed to a more managed approach to teaching, learning and research which often involves the use of performance management systems. In the

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area of postgraduate education, such an approach might involve students simply being allocated to a supervisor without any consultation about whether or not the researcher feels able to take on the study. Other universities are much more resistant to management with the result that a 'lighter touch' is used (McKenna and Boughey, 2014).

Since South Africa emerged from apartheid in the early 1990s, the need to engage with the globalised 'knowledge economy' has been paramount. A number of studies (see for example, ASSAf, 2010) and policy documents including the National Plan 2030 (RSA, 2012) identify the importance of postgraduate qualifications to economic development and thus to the future of the country. The ASSAf PhD Study outlines the position thus:

There is broad consensus in the scientific community that not enough high-quality PhDs are being produced in relation to the developmental needs of the country. Studies show a clear link between the economic wealth of nations and their 'citation intensity'. According to this analysis, South Africa is clustered with countries such as Poland, Russia and Brazil, and the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in its Ten Year Innovation Plan urges South Africa to increase its knowledge output substantially if it is to join the ranks of wealthier countries. Put differently, for South Africa to be a serious competitor in the global knowledge economy, both the quality and quantity of PhDs need to be expanded dramatically. The production of high-quality PhDs requires both quality of input (e.g. supervision, facilities, environment, student) and quality of output – that is the graduate (ASSAf, 2010:21).

Currently, South Africa produces only about 28 PhDs per million of the population (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015), a figure that compares very unfavourably with other countries in a comparable economic position. Brazil, for example, produces 52 per million and, although figures are not available for China, the investment in higher education generally and in postgraduate study in particular, indicates an enormous drive to increase postgraduate production.

Interestingly, the ASSAf report notes the need to increase both the quantity and quality of PhD in South Africa. Quality is, of course, an elusive notion but, in this case, could refer to the need for methodologies and theoretical approaches to be cross-cutting and cutting edge alongside the need for work to be inter- and trans-disciplinary. Clearly, this has enormous implications for supervisors who need to guide postgraduate studies and who, depending on their own experiences at doctoral level, may not have been exposed to a wide range of methodological and theoretical approaches, a situation which is then exacerbated by the lack of

a 'research culture' in the institutions in which they work which would contribute to their ongoing development.

ENGAGING WITH SUPERVISORS, ENGAGING WITH CONTEXT

Is it possible to do justice to all these complexities in a general course on postgraduate supervision that is offered across universities in South Africa? In a single course, is it possible to address the many contexts in which supervision takes place, ranging from the personal, to the institutional, to the disciplinary, to the political, to the historical? As individuals involved in the design of the course which brought the contributors of this book together, we were very aware of the danger of trying to make the course 'all things to all people'. We were also aware that any attempt to impose a 'blueprint of supervision' on our colleagues would not be sound and would be resisted by participants who, in any case, would be drawing on their own experience and expertise as supervisors working in the postgraduate arena. The course design team therefore approached its task with a hefty dose of humility with regard to what we could do and what we should do.

One of the earliest realisations of the course design team was that what we could do was facilitate in-depth conversations about what it means to do postgraduate supervision work which would not only allow participants to engage on the basis of their own experience, expertise and context but which would also allow them to decide to what to give attention and what to leave for another day. That is not to say that the course just drifted on the sentiments of groups of colleagues, but that there was a serious intention to create a space where people could speak up about their own experiences. Some of these experiences encompassed those of the participants as they themselves were 'under supervision' and how they imagined or practised their own supervisory practices as a result of it. This book draws on those conversations and the reflections they prompted as participants engaged with other parts of the experience offered by the course, including the assessment portion.

At this point, it is important to recognise that, in focusing on facilitating meaningful conversations, the course was not intended to be 'neutral' or 'innocent' in any way. Rather, it was a course with the explicit aim of prompting engagement with the tricky and contentious issues to be found in any context riven by inequality and disparities.

The first theme addressed in the very first hours of the very first day of the course involved power and social exclusion in supervision. Issues of gender, race, class, age, language, academic hierarchy, and all their intersectionalities were addressed directly in spite of the fact that participants may not yet be familiar with each other even though they work in the same institution. This overt confrontation with the

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power struggles that are played out on a daily basis in everyday life in South Africa, and not only in academic teaching spaces, was understood to be so important that it needed to be privileged 'upfront' as an issue in supervision. Some participants considered this sort of start to a course on supervision hard to swallow. By the end of the course, as feedback shows, many found addressing issues related to social exclusion and power at the outset set the tone for the course in an unequivocal way, and indicated their growing awareness that supervision is not 'something special' operating outside the broader socio-cultural processes in South Africa, but must rather be understood as a practice that is a microcosm of South African society.

In particular, participants from the Natural Sciences expressed their apprehension towards the concepts and language used to address issues related to social inclusion and power. Some even denied that such problems existed in their field. These levels of discomfort during the course were not ignored but openly discussed, using examples from different disciplines. Regardless of discipline, thinking about knowledge production is crucial with a focus on people involved in that process. It is important to work across disciplines, moving beyond Humanities and the Social Sciences only.

As we have tried to indicate, the goal of the course is to improve supervision in all universities in South Africa by offering opportunities to spend time thinking about issues, processes and approaches to supervising students. The need for supervisors to understand and develop their own scholarly identity is stressed throughout the course. If students themselves are to achieve the highest levels of scholarship in their own studies then they need to be guided by someone with a personal investment in such scholarship. As you will read in the various chapters in the book, there is a certain level of pride in having, nurturing and sustaining a scholarly identity, in being a scholar. A scholarly identity may be considered a professional identity, but for many academics it is closer to a particular lifestyle than anything else. As contributors to the project, and developers and facilitators of the course, what is evident to us is that the course has often prompted participants to consider their very 'being' in the academy as well as in society more generally.

In this chapter we have focused on the South African context in particular and the role the course on supervision which prompted this book has played in trying to address issues and problems found there. As the Preface to this volume indicates, the project on which the book was based involved collaboration between academics from Dutch and South African universities. The problems and issues we have indicated as relating to power and social inclusion must not be understood as uniquely South

African problems as those involved in the project from the Netherlands¹ will attest. Issues related to power and social inclusion are inscribed in all societies and require a direct and critical response.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As we write this introductory chapter, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the South African higher education system is in turmoil. The student protests of 2015 and 2016 not only called attention to the dire lack of state funding for the universities but also to the failure of the universities themselves to 'transform'. The decision, on the part of the State President, to impose a 0% rise in tuition fees for the 2016 academic year has resulted in many universities having to employ austerity budgets and other measures to contain costs. The position for the future is still uncertain as the Presidential Commission appointed to investigate the possibility of free higher education will not report until 2017. The impact of austerity on budgets for research which sustain postgraduate education and supervision has yet to be seen. At the same time, transformation work is costly, requiring funding for scholarships and, sometimes, for the mentoring and support of new supervisors.

The calls for the 'decolonisation' of the curriculum in the protests of 2015 in particular obviously has implications for the course which prompted this volume and for those involved in developing and facilitating it. Project members all shared a strong belief in the need for a lifelong investment in a scholarly identity. From this perspective, the intellectual critique of the 'neoliberal university' and, particularly, of the business and management discourses that prevail at many universities was particularly meaningful. Even to speak of the 'production' of PhDs is disturbing in this context.

We were also mindful that the challenges to South African higher education are not unique. Universities across the rest of Africa also struggle to define their role in society, address the various challenges they are facing and set their research agenda (Zeleza and Oluksuhi, 2004) and so too do universities elsewhere.

Mindful of the calls for universities to 'decolonise', the group called upon a colleague at Rhodes University, Corinne Knowles, a participant in one of the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* courses, to write a reflective piece in a series entitled

¹ See for instance <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150313224103532>; <https://libcom.org/blog/student-protests-escalating-amsterdam-25022015>; <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/05/dutch-students-rebel-university-corporate-turn-150507063029643.html>, (accessed 6 September 2016)

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‘Points to Ponder’ published within the course. In the piece, Knowles (2015:3) states clearly the position of those calling for change and its implications for supervision:

The internationalisation of Higher Education and HE studies has meant that the emerging intellectual conversations around HE practices and knowledge draw heavily on a western canon, which is establishing itself in the thinking on, for instance, supervision practices in South Africa. Scholars in this country have tended to work with and cite this canon in order to frame our orientations ... The coloniser’s pedagogic framework has become part of who we are as thinkers and teachers, and is part of the content and terms of our conversations, as well as whom we inspire our postgraduates to become.

Rethinking supervisory pedagogy in the context of this challenge has to be an ongoing task – one which will be pursued as the course continues to be offered. As we have indicated repeatedly in this introduction, the intention was never for the course to impose anything on supervisors but rather to explore what could be possible through meaningful conversation. It is thus our hope that the course will generate knowledge about ‘decolonised supervisory practices’ as it continues to be offered. With this end in mind, we accept Knowles’ (2015) challenge to include readings which provide ‘an alternative view to the western ideas’ in the course and trust that as our conversations continue so our understandings will grow and, importantly, we will be able to share those understandings with the rest of the world. This volume is but a small step in reaching this goal.

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2

THE SUPERVISORY PROCESS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOLARSHIP

REFLECTIONS ON THREE JOURNEYS

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I reflect on three supervisory journeys: that of a colleague who is a senior professor in my school; my own journey as a doctoral student and supervisee; and my subsequent journey as a new researcher and supervisor of my own postgraduate students' research. I compare and contrast our experiences as supervisors or supervisees in a professional school in a South African university. My reflection focuses on the notion of the development of scholarship in the course of the supervisory journey. My interest in the development of scholarship was first aroused as I reflected on my struggles as a doctoral student, making shifts between disciplines and between research approaches and methodologies, as I made the transition from Biodiversity Conservation research to Science Education research.

My reflection on the three journeys seeks to understand, firstly, from a discussion with a senior academic in my school, how she developed scholarship in her postgraduate students and how this transformed her supervision style over time as she worked with different students. Secondly, looking back on my own PhD journey with my own supervisor as a biologist studying towards a doctoral degree in Science Education, I reflect on how my supervision journey facilitated the transition. I reflect on the ways in which those aspects of scholarship that were transferable between disciplines were strengthened while some were remodelled to be relevant to my new education researcher identity. Thirdly, I reflect on my own practices as a current supervisor of doctoral students to understand how I am drawing from my own experience as a former supervisee to inform my orientation and style of supervising postgraduate research and to help develop scholarship in my own students.

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DEFINING SCHOLARSHIP

To define scholarship, I draw from the work of Boyer, particularly his Carnegie report of 1990 and his lecture of 1994. Boyer (1990:28) defined scholarship in terms of research, service and teaching. In his 1994 lecture entitled 'Scholarship assessed' Boyer proposed what he called 'a new paradigm of scholarship with four interlocking parts' (Boyer 1994: 27). He articulated the four forms of scholarship in his summary as follows:

Putting all of this together, I can imagine a grid in which the four forms of scholarship: discovery, integration, application, and teaching are placed horizontally across the top. (Boyer 1994:54)

... to keep the flame of scholarship alive, we must give new dignity and new status to the scholarship of teaching. (Boyer 1994:58)

Although Boyer was addressing scholarship in relation to the professoriate, I find his categorisation of scholarship useful in framing my discussion on supervision. According to Boyer 'every member of the academy should demonstrate his or her ability to do disciplined research', which he terms 'the Scholarship of Discovery' and be able to make connections and contextualise disciplinary knowledge, 'the Scholarship of Integration' (Boyer, 1994:28-29). For Boyer the Scholarship of Integration included the work of academics in such disciplines as psycho-linguistics or bio-engineering, which embrace 'what Michael Polanyi calls 'overlapping academic neighborhoods' (Boyer, 1994:35).

Boyer's third category of scholarship focuses on maintaining the relevance of academia to real social, economic and other civic issues; 'to relate the theories of research to the realities of life' (Boyer 1994:39). This Boyer called the 'Scholarship of Application'. In his 1990 paper he had discussed a similar scholarship of service. In the South African context, the development of this kind of scholarship in doctoral students is an interesting subject, considering the various doctoral experiences of students in the variety of institutions that now exist in the country. For example, would the development of this form of scholarship differ in traditional universities, in universities of technology and in comprehensive universities?

Finally, Boyer (1994:45) saw teaching as a priority of the professoriate and argued that teaching was important in order 'to sustain the work of the academy'. It can be argued that it is not necessary to develop this form of scholarship during the doctoral journey. However, for those doctoral students who, at the completion of their studies, find themselves in tertiary institutions as new lecturers, the journey seems to be incomplete without any deliberate development of the scholarship of teaching. In such cases the development of the scholarship of teaching tends to

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be assumed and not explicitly addressed in the doctoral journey and it becomes a private engagement for the student.

For a more elaborate definition of the scholarship of teaching, I turned to the work of Trigwell and Shale (2004), who tease out the notion of ‘scholarship’ in the various models of university teaching. They argued that scholarship was in ‘the construction and critical review of the knowledge base for teaching’, the core concepts of which include ‘reflection, communication, pedagogic content knowledge, scholarly activity and pedagogic research’. They further argue that a view of teaching as ‘a reflective and informed act engaging students and teachers in learning’ is supportive of the aims central to the project of developing a scholarship of teaching (Trigwell and Shale, 2004:524). An earlier elaboration of this view is held by Kreber and Cranton (2000) who define the scholarship of teaching as both learning and knowing about teaching. They describe the development of scholarship in teaching as a process comprised of reflection on experience-based knowledge and research-based knowledge of teaching.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOLARSHIP

Whilst Boyer’s definition of scholarship is made in the context of the professoriate, it nonetheless provides a framework for thinking about the forms of scholarship that might be developed through the process of doctoral supervision. I do not argue that the role of the doctorate is to induct students into the professoriate, but rather that the development of some, if not all, of the four forms of scholarship can and should begin for the student in the doctoral supervisory journey. With this in mind, I show how, in the journeys that I consider in this paper, there was some conscious effort to develop at least some of Boyer’s four interlocking parts of scholarship.

There was certainly deliberate effort to develop the scholarship of discovery, and the creation of new knowledge, and there were efforts to develop the scholarship of application through a growing ability to link theory to practice in the field of education. As for the scholarship of integration, this is probably best encapsulated in the multi/interdisciplinary nature of the field of education research itself with its ‘overlapping academic neighborhoods’ (Boyer, 1994:36). In the three journeys that I reflect on here, the scholarship of teaching is probably the least prominently developed, perhaps with good reasons considering that we were all located in a school of education whose core business is – or should be – to develop the scholarship of teaching for all its students anyway.

In his 1990 lecture Boyer (1990) made some suggestions on how the development of scholarship might happen in the context of the doctorate. I focus on only three

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which are most relevant to the journeys I am discussing: induction into the academic community; processes and practices in supervision; and the learning in supervision.

INDUCTION INTO THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

Boyer (1990:68) makes the assertion that 'it is in graduate education where professional attitudes and values of the professoriate are most firmly shaped' and goes on to ask, 'What might be the characteristics of graduate study that would most appropriately prepare tomorrow's scholars?' There are two important points made by Boyer in these statements. The first relates to aspects of induction of the student ('attitudes and values ... firmly shaped') to the community of practice, the professoriate. The second relates to identification of the 'characteristics of graduate study' that prepare the doctoral student to become a (future) scholar.

To illustrate these two points I refer to my experience as a doctoral student coming from a Natural Sciences background to Education. I had obtained my Master's degree in Zoology while working in Biodiversity Conservation, where I was inducted into systematics research and into working with local communities. After eleven years of practice I had become a member of the community of practice of Systematics and Biodiversity Conservation research, with well-established networks and collaborative relationships locally and abroad.

I then had the opportunity to spend two years at a university where I was invited to help establish a research programme, as the university transitioned to a research-active institution. My duties included teaching some Biology courses to undergraduate students enrolled in a variety of programmes, ranging from the Bachelor of Education to the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science, in Environmental Health and in Agriculture. At the end of the two years I decided to obtain a teaching qualification and continue in academia. I enrolled for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and, five years later, made the decision to embark on a doctoral degree in Science Education.

The shifts that I underwent in this academic journey were sometimes quite overwhelming. I went from being an expert in Systematics and Biodiversity Conservation research to being a novice lecturer in Biology and then a novice Science Education researcher. While I was comfortable teaching Biology, I struggled with the shift to being a student (again) and being a researcher in Science Education. I needed to gain access not only to the field of Science Education but also to its various communities of practice. I was joining the teaching community in the School of Education as a new lecturer and the graduate student community as a doctoral student. I needed guidance to access the tools to negotiate these unfamiliar terrains.

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As a novice researcher I was entering what Kamler and Thompson (2006:29) called 'occupied territory – with all the imminent danger ... that this metaphor implies – including possible ambushes, barbed wire fences, and unknown academics who patrol the boundaries of the already occupied territories'. I was to go through a long process of change from one discourse (Systematics and Biodiversity Conservation research) to a new one (Science Education research). I came from a research culture that did not require much collaboration, nor required me to work with other scientists as closely as I was now expected to do in Education research.

I had come from Natural Sciences research, working on ecosystems and landscapes, rarely ever concerned with people except for the local communities that lived in or close to some of the ecosystems of my interest. My interaction with other Biodiversity Conservation researchers was limited, whereas, as I was later to learn, in Education research I would not only work closely with other researchers but may need their feedback and continual validation of my thinking and research approach. My doctoral supervisor became my mentor and guide. He quickly worked out that while my subject matter knowledge and research experience (in Biology) was sound I was under-prepared in understanding of Education theory and the nature of Social Sciences research. He recommended that I attend two Masters of Education courses – Theories in Science Education and the Research Design course.

I believe that attendance of those two courses transformed my PhD experience, and enabled my participation in the doctoral learning space in ways that would otherwise not have been possible. I got to understand the difference between the kind of research I had done in Biology and what was expected of me in Social Science research. I had not previously engaged with theories of learning and their place in conceptualising research, their role in determining the kinds of data that I would require and how I would analyse it to answer my research questions. I learnt for the first time about paradigms and their role in research, as well as the different genres of academic writing.

I was introduced to the conventions, rules and values that informed practice in this new terrain; and to what it actually means to be a member of this community of practice. I was able to participate and contribute to the debates in the doctoral discussion groups and, in time, I gained the confidence to lead discussions. In short, I was affirmed. As my confidence grew I began to identify with the Education research community. My supervisor's insightful guidance had facilitated my induction and inclusion. This was for me a big part of the development of scholarship in my new field of research.

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What this experience also did was to show me that I was able to learn much more than I had thought myself capable of. It inspired me to engage more deeply with the field of Science Education. I wanted to know more, not just about topics related to my PhD study but about other topics related to Science Education research, and about the various paradigms, theoretical perspectives and methodologies. With the help of my supervisor, I published my first Education research paper in the second year of my PhD study. My supervisor also helped me prepare and present my first paper at a Science Education conference.

Attendance at the conference was another important step in induction into the community of practice, exposing me to the diversity of research topics in Science Education and to my supervisor's network of fellow researchers and collaborators in the field. It helped me put my own work into perspective within this broader context of general Education research. The various scholars that I met and interacted with were to become my role models as they enacted what it means to be members of this particular academic community.

Boyer (1990:68) says that in doctoral research on a narrow isolated topic 'creative integrative thinking often is repressed' and that it therefore produces 'specialists without perspective'. This highlights the tension in the supervision process between the need for a supervisor to be well established, knowledgeable, and an expert in her/his discipline and yet still engage with the broader academic community. A similar tension exists for the doctoral student, who needs to be willing and able to start contributing to the broader debates in the field yet continue to focus on the study (a narrow topic) and strive to meet the institutional requirements for the qualification.

As Boyer argues, my professional attitudes and values of the professoriate were shifted and reshaped during the course of my graduate education. This happened through a supervision process that not only offered institutionally mandated academic mentorship but also provided a deliberate induction into the community of practice of Social Science research in general and Education research in particular.

PROCESSES, PRACTICES AND LEARNING IN SUPERVISION

I now move on to my colleague's supervisory journey to illustrate some of the processes and practices that shape learning and the development of scholarship in supervision. In the excerpt below she talked about how being an experienced supervisor, who was sure of her niche in the field, had influenced her supervision style and how her style of supporting her students had transformed over time.

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My colleague, who for the sake of this account I will refer to as 'Jane', opened her remarks about supervision by stating that

Supervision is pretty much like teaching. Just as we tend to teach in the way we were taught, we tend to start out supervising in the way we were supervised. However, my supervision style has evolved. At first I supervised in the way I was supervised but in time as I established my own niche in research I insisted on taking only students whose interests matched my interest area. That way I was able to determine my own style of supervising. (Interview, 30 July 2014)

Jane explained how her role as supervisor had transformed in two ways. The first was with regard to the nature of student support that she gives to her students. Her first PhD was co-supervised with a more experienced colleague and she noticed that she and her colleague gave different forms of feedback. He gave feedback at what she called 'the macro scale', focusing on the more global conceptual issues, while she, on the other hand, gave micro scale feedback, commenting on details, sentence by sentence. In time she says her own way of co-supervising has evolved and in co-supervision she now gives the more global feedback at the conceptual level while the new supervisors tend to focus on the micro scale.

The second point Jane made was that while the role of a supervisor was as advisor/mentor to her students, she felt it was more important to be able to provide academic leadership for her students. She said that knowing her own niche in research had shaped her supervision style and the provision of academic leadership for her students. She can now afford to be selective about who she takes on as PhD students. Her students work on various aspects of the same project and she can say 'No' to students whose interests are too far outside her own. This, she says, allows her to be able to support and guide her students more effectively – for example, by pointing them to the requisite literature.

Brew and Peseta (2004) allude to the importance of reflection and feedback in the supervisory process. In their intervention with Australian academics they found that, as they reflected on their own supervision, they began to think about it differently. It seems that in the interview Jane was able to reflect on her own supervision style and realised that her style was different from her fellow supervisor's. In time she noticed how her own supervision style and sense of herself had shifted. For example, she also talked about her supervisory role extending to a mentorship-advisory one and how she provided academic leadership to her students. These kinds of shifts in roles and supervisory focus present a challenge for new supervisors like myself.

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As a new supervisor it is not automatically obvious what the nature of the academic leadership required in supervision is, nor how to operationalise it for each student so as to be able to provide the support that they need as individuals. As Anne Lee suggests, development of supervision skills should be part of a 'continuing professional development activity, CPD' which also enables new and experienced supervisors together 'to uncover the conceptions [of research supervision] that they hold and examine them alongside other supervisors' (Lee, 2007: 691). Lee argues for that supervisors need such skills as flexibility, to be able to use different supervision approaches, depending on the student's needs and where they are in their research journey. For instance, a postgraduate student who is also a probationer requires different kinds of assistance to that required by a full-time student whose focus is primarily on the PhD. The supervisor would need to decide when to take a mentoring approach, supporting the students in the same or different ways, and when to be a gatekeeper enculturating the staff member into the values and practices of the institution. Ultimately, the supervisor's toolkit, as it were, determines the type of researcher that their supervisees emerge as at the end of the supervision process.

In my experience as a doctoral student who was also a probationer in the same institution, the mentoring tends to supercede the enculturation, mainly because the practices of the institution are tacit and assumed. A supervisor who is also a colleague, as an insider has access to some of these assumptions and can at least attempt to make them explicit. However, the processes and structures for enculturation, especially for probation, are often centralised and managed remotely from the supervisor-supervisee interactional spaces, both physically and administratively.

Another area of concern is the institutional requirement for throughput which may cause supervisors to see themselves as required to operate in a functional role, affording progression to completion of the qualification. In the process they may overlook the development of critical thinking skills in their mentees. For me, this raises the question of how long a student should remain in the system. As a supervisor, the choice is between whether I encourage my students to finish as quickly as possible within the institutional timeframes or whether it is acceptable to allow a student to remain in the system long enough to acquire the evaluative and deep inquiry skills expected of an academic and researcher.

It is in resolving supervisory dilemmas such as this that I believe my toolkit, the range of skills and conceptions of supervision that I hold, is useful in determining what each student needs. As an aspect of my toolkit, I keep in mind the notion of academic leadership and constantly monitor my own growth to determine if I am attaining to that position. The thought can become overwhelming if one takes into consideration

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the three-to-five-year journey that a doctoral supervisor and supervisee have to undertake. It is a long relationship with each student, demanding the investment of considerable emotional intelligence on my part as the supervisor – a skill which can only come with experience.

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING

Boyer (1990, 1994) argues that it is the role of graduate schools to also equip students to be able to teach at all levels when they finish their doctorates. He argued that the academy was overemphasising the other three forms of scholarship over the scholarship of teaching. Manathunga and Goozée (2007) seem to be making a similar argument for both students and supervisors. They argue that it is an error for the academy to assume that a doctoral student is automatically a researcher and that a new supervisor is already an expert in supervision. This erroneous assumption seems to be one that South Africa's Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) makes. In this respect, Jane (the senior colleague interviewed) argues that just as we teach in the way we were taught, we tend to supervise in the way we were supervised, which would suggest that, without opportunities to reflect on our practice, our supervisees are at risk of being subjected to the same defects in supervision that we encountered. Boyer (1994) also seemed to be mindful of this error when he argued that institutional and academic procedures should be put into place to prepare doctoral graduates who are lecturers in universities for teaching and not just for research.

In a professional school such as the one I work in, doctoral students have previous training as school teachers. The doctoral process therefore focuses on making them into academics and researchers and the scholarship of teaching is assumed. One wonders if this assumption is always accurate. For instance, for doctoral students like myself, coming in with rather limited experience in teaching even if stronger in research experience than the more conventional Education doctoral student, it becomes necessary to consider how and where the scholarship of teaching is then to be developed. I contend that a similar question could be asked about some conventional Education doctoral students who are qualified school teachers but who then stay on to become university lecturers. The assumption is that their qualification as school teachers is sufficient for them to transition into university teaching and I argue that there may be a need for empirical evidence to support this assumption.

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CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed some of my experiences of supervision, both as a student and as a new supervisor, in contrast to the views of an experienced colleague in the same School. I defined scholarship in supervision by drawing from various sources and constructed a working definition of scholarship as a reflective act engaging students and supervisors in learning, mentorship, knowledge production and communicating ideas and research findings. The development of scholarship in supervision therefore involves supervisors taking on the role of mentors, and inducting their mentees into the academic community and into a scholarly community of practice. Successful induction of the mentee into the academic community tends to be dependent on the supervisor's own engagement in the community of practice. I also argued that while it is not the primary purpose of doctoral supervision to develop the scholarship of teaching, depending on the route they have taken to education research, some doctoral students do need to be supported and prepared for teaching in addition to research and service to the community.

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3

CHAOS, COMPLEXITY, AND CONTEXTS

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUPERVISION

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INTRODUCTION

For all our efforts to control the contents of our research, provide order to our administrative lives, and logically guide students through their development as readers, thinkers, and writers, there is a joyfully chaotic aspect to research, administration, supervision and, indeed, to life. This chaos is often linked to the complexities of natural or human-made systems (Campbell, 2012; Davidson-Harden, 2013; Foster, 2014; Giroux, 2002). It is also linked to the complexity of our identities, relationships, and inter-relatedness as people performing different roles at different times. Understanding chaos and complexity, in all forms and manifestations, requires ongoing engagement with the multiple contexts that shape species, spaces, processes, and systems.

In contemplating what it means to be a university lecturer, supervisor, historian, and emerging health and medical humanities educator and researcher in South Africa in 2016, the complexities of the tasks associated with these roles and the context in which they occur at personal, institutional, local, regional and global levels have to be considered. Drawing from these contemplations, this chapter is a reflection of some of the complexities and contexts that have shaped my understandings of myself as a supervisor, and of my supervision practices and, therefore, of what I believe effective supervision of postgraduate student research entails.

In South Africa, as elsewhere, it is not only the economic and class disparities that shape and influence whether or how people will receive education, but also what type of education they will receive. The legacies of constructions of 'race' and the realities of racism frame the experiences of communities and individuals, as do the gendered experiences of being a person in a country with high rape statistics,

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homophobia and homophobic violence, xenophobia, and ongoing daily violence. Alongside experiences that enrich and nurture us are the realities of verbal, mental, and physical acts of violence that range from macro-scale events, like the ongoing destruction of the planet, to mid-scale violence like the Marikana massacre (SA *History Online*, 2016), to the daily micro-aggressions that individuals face because of arbitrarily assigned societal markers of apparent otherness.

The difficulties of engaging meaningfully with our histories are ever present. They are sometimes heightened in academic establishments where institutional cultures and sustained silence about inherent power and privilege create alien, unwelcoming spaces, even as they also provide reasons to seek solidarity and undertake collective action. Regional and local contexts are also shaped by determined efforts to discuss and address these issues in a variety of fora.

The significance of engaging more fully and meaningfully with our past and current identities in academic institutions has been highlighted in 2015 by the student-led protests in various higher education institutions. Initiated by the Rhodes Must Fall (#RFM) campaign at the University of Cape Town, and taken up by other higher education institutions around the country, these protests and movements have revealed the depths of concern about unacknowledged power and privilege, and have also been representative of concerns about greater social injustices beyond the university context.

Local issues are, of course, refracted and reflected in regional, national and international contexts. So too are the crises in primary, secondary and tertiary education in terms of access, costs, and intent. In this respect, I recognise that I am negotiating my way in higher education at a time when, both locally and globally, Education, formal and non-formal, is increasingly being packaged according to qualifications delivered through pre-packaged curricula based on predetermined outcomes and integrated within the economic agenda – an integration framed within a discourse of improving competitiveness, jobs, standards and quality (Baatjes, 2005:26).

Neoliberal education policy operates from the premise that education is primarily a sub-sector of the economy, a definition of education that I actively resist at every opportunity. Within the framework of an increasingly functional, economic, product-based understanding of knowledge and knowledge acquisition, I believe it is important to encourage students to think and engage critically as individuals and global citizens, and not as consumers of qualifications. In a context in which students appear to be turning into clients, and lecturers, therefore, become service-providers, I draw from hooks (1994), Vally (2005) and Freire (1993) in wanting teaching to

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be transformative and to facilitate emancipatory consciousness in a space that can be defined, with all the associated complexities, as a feminist classroom or feminist research space (Seymour, 2007). This effort, however, is increasingly constrained by the far-reaching effects of failing neo-liberal economics and managerialism, which knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

Discussing the purpose and findings of her book, Weedon (1992:174) argues “that we need not take established meanings, values and power relations for granted” and that it “is possible to demonstrate where they come from, whose interests they support, how they maintain sovereignty and where they are susceptible to specific pressures for change”. For me it is important that, as supervisors and students, we are able to identify and discuss the established meanings, values and power relations that are taken for granted so that they can be named, analysed, and understood. Regardless of whether these meanings (and associated changes) are institutional, disciplinary, social, historical, economic or personal, I believe that being open to the contexts and complexities that shape and maintain them is an embracing of a vitally necessary chaos.

The relationships between ‘the personal’ and ‘the (gendered) political’ inherent in the structures and functions of universities, and in the roles and requirements of those who inhabit them, have received growing attention. In the last two decades work by academics such as Zeleza (2002), Pereira (2002), Barnes (2007) and Mohlakoana (2008) have considered global, regional, local and individual contexts that form and shape what universities – and those who work or study in them – have been, or are becoming. The current moments of upheaval and questioning occurring in some universities in South Africa add to this discussion and, while their impact on the future shape of universities – and those who inhabit them – cannot be foretold, they are a salient reminder that complexity cannot be ignored, context requires constant attention, and chaos needs to be embraced.

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL CONTEXTS

The university, faculty, and departmental contexts in which I supervise are of course influenced by the specificities of South Africa’s past, the politics of its future, and the complexities of its current regional and global standing. Higher education institutions in South Africa are under ongoing pressures to enrol more higher-degree graduates, generate research outputs, and ensure undergraduate throughput on ever-shrinking budgets. At the same time, the ongoing failure of primary and secondary education to prepare students for undergraduate work has placed additional burdens on tertiary education institutions, including on supervisors, to adapt their supervisory processes.

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The cost of higher education is already an exclusionary (gendered) factor in South Africa, despite increasing government-funded financial support options for students. This situation remains at a postgraduate level and is exacerbated in the humanities as disciplines like History are not able to offer students the levels of financial support that the science, engineering, technology and mathematics-based disciplines can. For many students dependant on external funding, or with very pressing familial responsibilities, the choice of subject to study at postgraduate level may not be one based on passion for a subject and a desire to pursue intellectual curiosity, but rather a more intellect-numbing practical choice based on funding opportunities and ideas about future employment options.

While institutional and departmental contexts (external contexts) frame some aspects of supervision, so too do personal factors (internal contexts). I am aware, for example, of several identities and paradigms within which my profession and myself are located. Amongst these identities I am a woman academic who has worked in historically white universities in South Africa; a first-generation university graduate; a feminist, vegan and supporter of social justice movements; a primary breadwinner; an employee in a vocation that is increasingly undervalued; an historian interested in AIDS and the intersections between health and society; a staff member who has recently completed a PhD (part-time); a lecturer who has focused more on teaching than on a research profile; and a lecturer and researcher currently engaged in shaping the emerging field of medical and health humanities.

The primacy of any of these identities varies depending on context-specific demands and the individual (or collective) agency that I have available to me to foreground certain identities as required in a particular moment.¹ Both external and internal contexts influence which identities need to be foregrounded at which times, and all shape the evolution of these multiple identities.

All who have to supervise are influenced by both external and internal contexts, as too are the postgraduate students that we supervise. For supervisors to maintain a sense of internal integrity in their research and supervision, I believe it is necessary to continue to reflect on both external and internal contexts and identities and to be willing to face whatever chaos that process reveals. So I have to constantly review my understandings of the complexities of 'race', class, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, and speciesism (amongst others) as they relate to both my personal and

¹ My thanks to Jennifer Clarence-Fincham for her insightful comments and suggestions that helped strengthen this chapter and particularly for highlighting the link between identities and agency in specific contexts.

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professional contexts.² Demanding this of oneself allows supervisors, as educators, to encourage students to understand and critically reflect on assumptions about ‘race’, class, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation and speciesism that they bring with them to the research they undertake. By Honours, Masters and PhD level, students often turn their attention to addressing these constructions in new and interesting research areas, thereby contributing not only to the evolution of their own emancipatory consciousnesses, but also to research framed by this awareness and in a reflexive research process that has integrity. In this respect, I share Rakow’s conviction that:

Those of us who step into classrooms as professors and as students do not shed our identities at the door with our coats. We enter those rooms as humans situated as subjects and as objects of discourses that give us the identities we claim for ourselves and that are assigned by others. We cannot set aside the social relationships of the larger world – a world in which classifications of gender, race, and class are among the most paramount – as we take up the more temporary relationship of [lecturer] and student (1991:10).

Similarly, educators retain those evolving identities when entering into a supervisory relationship while also formulating new academic identities as researcher, supervisor, and supervisee. At postgraduate level some of the most significant intellectual leaps are required – from undergraduate to postgraduate and, at postgraduate level, from Honours to Masters to PhD research. These intellectual leaps are taken by complex individuals who are part of complex communities. The postgraduate journey can be an education in disciplinary form and function and in personal awareness, such that postgraduate studies can be uncomfortable. However, if postgraduate study is to be more than merely the transmission of disciplinary skills and the creation of research outputs, it can also be challenging and rewarding for both postgraduate students and supervisors (see Zembylas, 2007).³

LOCATING MYSELF AS A SUPERVISOR

Weber (2010:128) observes that some of the “typical goals in the feminist classroom are for empowerment (understood as passion rather than domination), community, and agency”. These goals are also applicable to supervision and to empowering postgraduate students and directing them towards appropriate academic communities

2 To be speciesist is to actively favour and benefit one species over another and speciesism refers to the mechanisms, ideologies, practices, and politics associated with this favouring of one species (usually humans) over other species (usually non-human).

3 I am grateful to Tammy Shefer for pointing me to work by Zembylas and Boler relating to discomfort in teaching.

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while also enhancing their agency as individuals, students, and researchers. In line with other feminist principles, I see supervision as a relational process that is cognisant and respectful of the individuals involved. It is a process that should be challenging and rigorous, but also supportive and encouraging; and one that should occur in a space that is negotiated collaboratively and acknowledges the contributions, knowledge and humanity of both supervisor and supervisee. Maintaining a sense of balance between rigour and support can be challenging but it is a chaotic space with much potential for growth for both supervisor and student.

Aside from the feminist pedagogical principles that I apply to supervision, I have a sense of myself as a supervisor who can be demanding, but also sensitive to the people who are being supervised as postgraduate students and as embodied beings who may need different types of supervision at different stages of their research journeys. I have also found that while there are obvious differences between supervising Honours, Masters, and PhD students, the sense of myself as a supervisor and the basic principles that guide my supervision are applicable at all levels. In the chaos of the necessary changes and evolution that occur as a supervisor and academic there are thus still constants that can continue to inform contexts.

I am also aware that the effects of writing a thesis and being supervised while I myself was supervising other people framed and influenced my research practices and my sense of myself as a supervisor, which is, once again, changing as time passes. I am fortunate to have had the experience of being guided through my PhD by my own supervisor with great skill and patience, although I sometimes felt that I could do with clearer affirmation of my ideas and writing style, so I have worked on developing those aspects of my supervision of others. On reflection, I realise that a lot of my best supervisory practices are modelled on my own supervisor's supervision techniques. Similarly, some of my innovations in my supervisory practices are also in response to how he supervised me.

More broadly, I try to ensure that my supervisory practices and process are driven by integrity and consistency. I also try to supervise in such a way that the process will facilitate and nurture the development of younger researchers with the intention that they should learn and grow as people and researchers in their own right. In essence, I prefer a supportive mentoring approach to supervision, in line with my broader feminist and liberatory pedagogy, and try to always to cultivate this form of supervision.

As Weedon (1992:14) has noted, "knowledge brings with it the possibility of power and control" and ultimately what I would like is for the academic and personal knowledge that students acquire to empower them as researchers and people and

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allow them to feel in control of disciplinary knowledge, writing and research practices, and their reflexive and analytical capacities. Sometimes the specific context relating to the individual student has to be considered along with the context that I find myself in as a supervisor and it may be necessary to be more authoritarian and set strict boundaries with students in terms of submitting work regularly. I only take this approach when absolutely necessary as I prefer to give students the chance to develop their own schedules.

While I am a supervisor who is self-reflexive about supervisory practices, I also understand that it is important to seek advice when it is needed, realise that I still have a lot to learn, and that I belong to a community of supervisors with divergent views from whom much can be learned. I have also benefited from discussions about supervision and supervising with my colleagues, my own supervisor, my friends and peers, and from attending the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) Postgraduate Supervision Workshop in December 2010 and the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course in 2013.

I have found that one of the hardest things to learn as a supervisor is that we cannot be all things to all students and that the supervisory role can be difficult and must be handled with sensitivity and skill. I therefore do not have a sense of myself as an infallible supervisor, but rather one who is constantly learning.

PRACTICE OF COMPLEXITIES, AND THE CREATION OF NEW CONTEXTS

Being aware of the chaos, complexities, and contexts that shape our roles as professionals and individuals is important and necessary, but equally as important and necessary are working out ways to use that awareness to shape supervisory practices and learning processes. The following sections reflect on my experience as a supervisor and some of the practical steps I believe are important to take when trying to accommodate the chaos, incorporate complexities into practice, and create new contexts for teaching and learning for postgraduates.

During supervision, teaching is often literally a dialogue between the student and the supervisor. As I have elucidated earlier, I see the role of a supervisor as facilitating and empowering students to gain confidence in their writing and research, while also providing the types of guidance necessary to ensure that they are successful in these processes. Guiding the supervision process appropriately entails being a supervisor who does what is in the best interest of the student – even if that might be difficult for the supervisor personally or require them to perform multiple roles – so that the student can ultimately come into their own as a researcher.

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Another central role of supervision is a pastoral one, linked to the roles of both supervisor and a member of staff. The emotional and psychological well-beings of students have a direct impact on their capacity to perform academically. I have found that it is important to provide supportive space within which students can raise emotional concerns, from first-year to postgraduate level, and seek my advice on a variety of personal and academic matters. For this to happen requires clear demonstration of a genuine interest and concern for student well-being. In instances where it has become evident that students require ongoing professional psychological support I have often insisted on this as a requirement of ongoing supervision, as the primary concern should always be that the student receives the support required to work to the best of their ability.

APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The abilities of both student and supervisor are primarily measured in relation to the successful production of knowledge, but this itself requires closer attention. In universities, knowledge is produced in the formal and official forms of written texts completed by postgraduates. There are however, other types of knowledge produced, such as the self-knowledge created by postgraduates and supervisors in the form of individual growth and change, new ideas, new ways of understanding, and sometimes new ways of being. In thinking around the role of the supervisor in this I have been drawn to the suggestion that, as supervisors, we

should think in terms of transforming both the social relations of knowledge production and the type of knowledge produced. To do so requires that we tackle the fundamental questions of how and where knowledge is produced and by whom, and of what counts as knowledge. It also requires a transformation of the structures which determine how knowledge is disseminated (Weedon, 1992:7).

Aside from considering different types of knowledge immediately produced by student and supervisor within the parameters of specific institutions and disciplines, my recent involvement in discussions in the emerging fields of medical and health humanities, and environmental humanities, in South Africa have challenged me further. The inter- and transdisciplinary nature of these fields and their active commitment to exploring new ways of knowing have required me to reconsider my more conventional notions of what might be created by postgraduates if this challenge is fully embraced. I have not yet had to face this in my supervisory capacity but I am watching with interest developments in the field of Environmental Humanities South (see University of Cape Town, 2016), which is actively engaged in rethinking and re-imagining how research might be undertaken and what should be 'produced'.

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As a preliminary, I feel it is essential to ensure that students understand the limits of what a supervisor can do for them from the outset. This requires being clear about the basic expectations the supervisor has of the students they supervise and what students can expect in return. Furthermore, being honest about what it is that the supervisor can offer to a student in terms of subject knowledge and more general research support is a prerequisite for effective supervision. I thus always indicate what I do or do not know about a subject and suggest alternative supervisors if I do not think that I would be the most appropriate choice.

Sometimes students still request to be supervised by a supervisor who is not well versed in their subject because they are more concerned about guidance in the research and writing process than support with subject knowledge. When this has happened I have tried to ensure that I guide students to key texts on the subject or put them in contact with other academics who may be willing to offer advice, while also reading up on the subject area where possible. These are also situations that lend themselves to co-supervisory options

CREATING COMMUNITY

I believe that it is important for supervisors to be engaged in activities that support the creation and maintenance of an academic community that provides the context for student researchers to participate in an empowering way. Whilst there are many possible approaches to this, the following is an account of some of the practices I developed to embrace this aspect of supervision. Being in the odd position of being a staff member responsible for supervising postgraduates while also being a mature postgraduate while at Rhodes University made me particularly sensitive to the varied experiences that postgraduates had within the department, depending on age, occupation, location (on campus or off campus), and supervisor. As a result, I decided to implement a number of practices and process that would benefit postgraduates in the department as well as the students I was supervising.

A departmental postgraduate handbook is an excellent tool to ensure that all postgraduate students embarking on higher degrees within the department are able to easily obtain basic information about postgraduate studies generally and within the department. To this end, I undertook the compilation of brief twenty-page guide welcoming postgraduates to the department, providing information on administrative and general requirements for both the department and the university, and a brief overview of the progression from undergraduate to postgraduate degrees, as outlined in the national Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) from October 2007. Other topics that can be included in the guide include information on research

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supervision, references for books on thesis writing and grammar, information about preparing proposals and presenting them at departmental seminars, and links to sources of light relief (such as *PhD Comics*).

It was intended that all students who registered for postgraduate degrees in the department should receive a hard and electronic copy of this guide, along with the University's Higher Degrees Guide. The purpose of such a practice is to create a sense of community and of belonging to a much larger research community, by ensuring that all students feel welcomed into the department, receive the same introductory information, and feel part of an inclusive and participatory research environment.

However, my engagement with this exercise led me to conclude that although the introduction of the guide had been helpful, it was still sometimes difficult to create the circumstances in which departmental postgraduates who were not based at Rhodes felt fully included – especially if they held down full-time jobs or were based in other locations and did not have the means to come to campus. Although no clear resolution of this dilemma was achieved, as an interim measure I found it supportive of students to establish an email list for all postgraduates. Seminar proposals were circulated on this list, as were notices about workshops or funding opportunities for postgraduates and other pieces of news that might be of interest. Essentially, the guide and mailing list were efforts at organising into an accessible document the chaotic amounts of information that students starting postgraduate studies needed, and were a beginning in the process of creating a community of postgraduates.

Another initiative that can further the process of creating community is the departmental postgraduate workshop as it assists postgraduates to orientate themselves to the discipline in which they have chosen to work, the methodologies that can be employed in research in that discipline, and the pitfalls and pleasures of postgraduate research. The pilot postgraduate workshop that I initiated in 2011 brought together postgraduate students and staff from a number of departments to discuss aspects of postgraduate study and research from a variety of perspectives. It created a sense of community for postgraduate students and allowed new postgraduates to learn from and hear about the experiences of more established postgraduates. The success of the workshop and positive feedback indicate that it would be worth repeating regularly in future. However, one important learning that I gained from this process is that initiatives like this should not be dependent on any one individual in the department. If they are to succeed, sustainable plans for their continuation and full departmental support are imperative.

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Other initiatives that might be undertaken include establishing what additional support, particularly in terms of more comprehensive introductions to research methodologies, postgraduates feel are required. During my supervision at Rhodes I was involved in determining if our students would prefer financial support to be able to attend existing programmes or if we needed to consider collaborating with other departments to tailor-make a course for History postgraduates. I also had preliminary meetings with members of the postgraduate finance division to discuss funding options for students, with a view to information being included in guides and workshops and, hopefully, to making it possible for more students to consider postgraduate studies. I found it useful also for staff in the department to be informed about funding opportunities for students. Once again, I believe there is a need for departmental strategies that are not reliant on one individual to provide animation for such initiatives but that ensure they are part of the academic/postgraduate culture of a department.

Part of introducing postgraduates into academic communities and communities of practice is to ensure the creation of supportive spaces where research or research ideas can be presented, critiqued and complimented. Departmental seminar series can be used to this end. At Rhodes I established a departmental seminar series entitled 'History in the Making'. Honours students used the University's proposal format to discuss their research projects at the outset of their work so that they could benefit from the comments of staff and peers before proceeding with their research. At the end of the year they presented a seminar on their completed work. In addition to designing guidelines on making presentations, I found it beneficial to have meetings before and after the presentations with the students I was supervising to discuss concerns they had about presenting, or any feedback they received from the process.

All MA and PhD students presented their proposals to the seminar prior to submitting them to the Higher Degrees Committee, as well as presenting at least once a year on their research work. Staff members presented conference papers or journal articles and in so doing engaged peers and students in the process of academic writing and critique. Thus the seminars provided another space in which students could make their academic voices heard and engage in a dialogue with staff and other postgraduates.

While not all postgraduates immediately saw the benefit of participating in the seminar series, a student who is in the second year of her MA noted that although it was mentally and emotionally demanding to present her work at the seminar it was "a good experience for me and forced me to solidify and compress my ideas further

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in order to effectively articulate them in the selected time". Similarly, an Honours student noted:

In terms of presenting, I was truly terrified to present to the whole department, and I think this was probably fairly obvious when I did my mini-thesis proposal. I think that it was great that I got to present in this department and get used to having to speak in an academic arena in a comfortable environment to build up my confidence (although it still has a LOOONG way to go) for discussions/conferences/seminars I may participate in, in the future.

Having initiated such activities, it is important to get feedback to establish how effective they are and what improvements might be made. This might need to be done in a formal process – certainly my informal email attempts did not yield many responses. However, what was revealed was (once again) the difficulty of participation for off-campus students. In this respect, a suggestion was made that, in order to facilitate participation by students based elsewhere, the department should have considered having two or three concentrated days of seminar presentations and, at the end of the year, a 'postgraduate conference'.

PERSONAL PROCESSES AND PRACTICES: SUPERVISORS AND STUDENTS

My personal processes and practices relating to supervision can be divided into those that are about me as a supervisor and those that are about the students that I supervise. One of the most important processes for me is ensuring that I have peers and colleagues whose advice I trust that I can talk to, formally and informally, about supervision generally or about specific instances.

When I first began supervising students I would periodically have conversations with my HOD, Prof. Paul Maylam, who was also my supervisor for my own PhD at the time, and talk through what I was doing or seek advice if I had any concerns. In an email exchange about supervision he shared the following thoughts:

A first essential step – a masters or PhD student must have a sense of what constitutes a masters or PhD thesis. Therefore the student should be told to read a good thesis at either of those levels, depending on which level the student is embarking on. Students who have managed a reasonable Honours project often have little idea that the step-up to a full-length MA thesis is considerable. An even greater leap is that from a coursework MA thesis to a PhD. The magnitude of the step-up must be impressed on the candidate.

The supervisor needs to make a careful assessment of the student being supervised. Different students will have different needs. So there is no general formula or set of rules for supervising. Students who are

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particularly able and highly motivated will not need much supervising – just guidance and encouragement. Other less able students will require regular supervision, especially in formulating the problem and questions to be addressed. This is a crucial stage, as without a clear sense of direction research becomes impossible.

Forewarn students about common difficulties experienced by research students. The most common – a sense of pointlessness – why am I spending so many years working on this obscure topic which is going to be of interest to only a handful of people at best? I have never met a postgrad who has not felt this way. So impress upon the student that this is essentially an exercise – part of one's training, a means to an end. Also warn that time flies by.

Students think they have two or three years full-time to work on the thesis and that it will be easy to crack it in that time. Not so, unless full use is made of the time. Consistent work is required, otherwise time catches up with one.

It is crucial to maintain a good working relationship with the student. If he/she becomes dissatisfied with the quality of the supervision the student should state this to the supervisor, rather than go rushing off to the dean. This can be difficult, given the power relationship, but the supervisor must be open to criticism/complaint – the problem can then be sorted out. Similarly, the supervisor needs to be frank with the student.

On reading this email I was pleased to note that many of the key points raised were similar to discussions in other fora that eschewed a one-size-fits-all approach to supervision. I found that to have theoretical discussions borne out by a knowledgeable supervisor's experiences was useful as it allowed for a more engaged exploration of the relationship between theories and practices of supervision.

I had numerous conversations with another colleague who had a reputation for getting even the most challenging students through their research. She distilled her advice down to one central point – that it is better to over-supervise and to demand constant and regular work from students than to leave students to their own devices for too long and risk them stalling on their thesis. As a result of the many experiences shared with me by this colleague I was obliged to reflect on whether I had in the past placed too much faith in students when a firmer set of deadlines may have been more appropriate.

Ultimately I decided that this has to be context specific. Enforcing stricter deadlines on one student resulted in them rising to the occasion and producing good work more timeously. This experience acted as a reminder that I needed to be more conscious of finding a balance between my identities as, on the one hand, a supervisor who

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provides space for students' multiple identities to emerge, and, on the other hand, one who needs to be more deliberately involved in shaping students' identities as researchers.

In terms of my supervision practices and processes as they relate to students, I ensure that students have all the basic administrative information they require in terms of registering, knowing about the University and departmental requirements, and knowing where to go for help with research, psychological support, or financial assistance. It is important to consider the multiple identities students negotiate when determining if additional information or support might be required. Depending on age and expected gender roles, for example, students may have different domestic and familial responsibilities that need to be considered during postgraduate study.

In my practice of supervision, the formal supervision process begins with the initial meeting with the student who has approached me to supervise them. The purpose of this meeting with the student is to discuss the parameters of supervision and to establish clear definitions and guidelines around what supervision does and does not entail. I ask students to come to the first meeting with clear suggestions about the type of supervision they require. Aside from setting boundaries and ensuring that administrative concerns are addressed, the meeting allows me to determine which identities contribute to how students see and present themselves. During the meeting it is possible to gauge some of the identities that are important to students, based on the information they provide and conversations that occur. This in turn allows me to consider which of my identities I need to be conscious of, or bring to the fore, to ensure the best way forward in the supervisory process.

If I have not taught the students as undergraduates I ask them to come to the meeting prepared to discuss an academic article, thesis, or book that they find inspiring and to explain what it is about the work that appeals to them. Sometimes this makes it easy to identify what methodologies or theoretical frameworks appeal to the students. In other cases, discussing why the student wants to study the topic can help determine how best to proceed with the research project. The purpose of the process around the first meeting with a student seeking supervision is, primarily, one of trying to establish from the student what their research strengths and weaknesses are so that I can ensure that they do research that best suits their skills but will also challenge them.

After the initial meeting I ask students to go away and come up with three questions around the topic that they are interested in and to compile a thematic bibliography on the topic, indicating primary and secondary sources. This guiding exercise helps students to begin to formulate research questions and allows us to assess the

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feasibility of the research in terms of the available resources and sources. This initial document forms the starting point of a series of discussions from which the research questions are eventually refined and is often the basis of the research proposal that each student needs to write.

Central to the supervision process then is allowing students to discover what they are interested in and how they might go about researching that interest. One of my Honours students, for example, was interested in female genital cutting (FGC) but was clear that she wanted to pursue her master's degree in Human Rights rather than History. She therefore needed a project that would show competence in History, but would also help her prepare for her MA and for her longer-term plans to work in the non-governmental organisation sector or on international policy development relating to gender and health. The student battled to focus, so we decided to contain the topic and focus on UN policies and reports on FGC over a set period of time. This allowed her to contextualise the work historically and develop the capacity to undertake a comparative analysis of key features of the reports.

Turning to the production of written work, grappling with academic writing can be a significant obstacle for many postgraduates – as it can be for many academics. I consider it important to provide feedback that will eventually allow students to be able to identify areas of their writing that need addressing generally, while also improving specific components of their writing. Self-motivation and ability to manage writing and reviewing processes are important for postgraduate students.

A student-focused approach to the process of providing feedback can provide opportunities for adapting supervisory practices to meet student's requirements. For example, one student wanted more detailed feedback but was afraid to ask in case they 'looked stupid' while another wanted more time just to talk about ideas but was concerned that this was not really her supervisor's role and so had not asked. The first student's ability to express their vulnerability about being seen to be 'stupid' allowed me the opportunity to reassure the student of their abilities and discuss the unsettling nature of growing into a postgraduate researcher. With the second student specific supervision sessions were held to either discuss feedback or to simply talk about ideas, which allowed the student to feel more confident about coming to discuss thoughts even if they had not yet written anything related to them.

Notwithstanding earlier observations on setting time frames for student work, I feel strongly that postgraduates should be given time and space to grow into their academic selves. It is primarily their identities as postgraduate students, researchers, and potentially the next generation of academics, that supervisors are tasked to help form and shape. This identity, however, does not exist in a vacuum and is only one of

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the identities that students occupy. Ignoring the other identities that are important to students may stunt their growth into their academic selves, constituting a disservice not only to the people concerned, but also the disciplines we teach in, and the future of research and academia. I am weary, therefore, of acceding to the increasing pressure to force students to complete degrees in time frames that appear to suit administrators and funders rather than postgraduates and academics.

Churning out degrees in set periods of time may look like success, but if it is at the cost of nurturing depth and breadth in scholarly engagement it is a success only for bean-counters and not for those who should be able to analyse, understand, and critically examine the beans. I want to induct postgraduates into the discipline and the practices of research by highlighting the importance of scholarship and critical engagement and not the pressures of publishing or perishing.

In order to support postgraduates – particularly masters and PhD students – to develop the sense that they are entering a community of scholars, I have found it valuable to encourage certain students to participate in academic conferences. I have, for example, arranged that conference organisers accept a proposal for a panel that included postgraduate students. Being able to attend a conference and experience being part of a larger academic community – without feeling pressurised to have to publish – is, I believe, an invaluable experience for postgraduates.

While insisting that postgraduates publish is not of primary importance in my approach to supervision, when students produce exceptional work that I think would make a good article, I do consider it important to provide support through the publication process. This might include advising the student about what to expect in terms of time frames for publication and receiving reviewer's reports; offering suggestions on the article's structure; and editing versions of the work to the version submitted as the final article. Postgraduates (and others) often need encouragement to be brave enough to submit work for publication and it can be helpful for students to have a supervisor expressing confidence in their work.

Once students have completed their PhDs, I think there is a different reason to encourage publication from a thesis – not for the sake of subsidies, but for the sake of disseminating knowledge and assisting postgraduates into professional scholarship. In this instance I think my role as a supervisor would be to make suggestions about whether to publish articles, a monograph, or a combination of both from the PhD. My other responsibility would be to help identify possible material for different types of publication and offer support during the process to ensure publication.

CHAPTER 3 • CHAOS, COMPLEXITY, AND CONTEXTS: SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUPERVISION

CONCLUSION

In addition to providing insights into aspects of my particular approach to supervision, this chapter is also a statement on the importance and necessity of carefully considering the contexts – personal, political, professional, and institutional – in which supervision is crafted and practised. Committing to meaningful engagement with, and understandings of, the multiple contexts in which we exist requires, amongst other things, a willingness to constantly critically reflect on ourselves and on how we teach and learn. Embracing the chaos and complexity of the contexts in which I work and live, requires engaged and reflexive practice, and has unexpected benefits.

For sometimes, in the frenzy of chaos, complexities, and contexts that shape our personal and professional lives, we forget that there can be calm and centeredness and that supervision provides space for creatively engaging with the processes of teaching, researching, writing, and forming new identities. Having space to reflect on our own experiences of being supervised and on our practices as supervisors allows us to see the positive and negative, the order and chaos, and the complexity and simplicity of the experiences that shaped us and the experiences we are currently shaping.

In thinking about how I supervise, I was able to identify which aspects of my supervision were modelled on practices that I liked and responded well to when I experienced them as a postgraduate student. Equally, I was able to identify practices that came about as a means of ensuring that the students I supervise do not experience the negative aspects of supervision that I did.

Facing chaos, complexity and context can empower supervisors to be more open with the students we supervise. From experience and reflection, I now feel able to insist on certain parameters and boundaries with students while encouraging them to be more open about areas of supervision that they think need to be changed or improved. This can result in strengthened supervisory practices and in learning to adapt different things for different students. Engaging with the chaos, complexity, and contexts that students and supervisors find themselves in creates opportunities for teaching and learning that are mutually beneficial to students and supervisors.

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4

PERSPECTIVES ON BECOMING A SUPERVISOR

TOWARDS A CRITICAL APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

Postgraduate supervision is a complex pedagogy reliant on the interplay between, on the one hand, the supervisor, the student and other members of the university and, on the other hand, knowledge traditions, disciplinary norms and research cultures. Despite this complexity, it is generally expected that on attaining a doctoral degree the academic is suitably qualified to supervise (DoE, 2013). This chapter argues that a nuanced understanding of this complexity of supervision requires a focus on multiple issues.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the ways in which the personality of the supervisor plays out in the postgraduate process. In doing this I acknowledge that the personality of the student is also important, as are the philosophical and paradigmatic lineages of the discipline. A lens that I argue is useful in coming to an understanding of postgraduate supervision is that of discourse and textuality. By discourse, I specifically refer to the language, attitudes and conventions that constitute the disciplinary 'community' and which the supervisor has the potential to open to the student. Textuality, on the other hand, is concerned with the construction of knowledge as represented by a specific text – in this case, different texts that precede, contribute to the formation of and ultimately form part of a research report in the form of a dissertation or thesis.

I conclude the chapter by arguing for the adoption of a critical approach to supervision. As doctoral studies are considered to be a significant step in the process of a particular regime of knowledge creation, the manner in which that is achieved should be problematised. The supervisor therefore need not reduce his or her role to that of imparting the skills that the student requires in order to succeed in academia,

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but should, in addition, critique the position imposed by the academic community so that the student, in turn, does not only view his or her role as that of reproduction. The arguments presented in this chapter are drawn from my own discipline of English language studies and linguistics.

THE 'SELF' OF A SUPERVISOR

In order to understand the 'self' of a supervisor, in the context of this chapter, it is important to conceive it in terms of Phelps' (2015) view that 'self' can be divided into I-self and Me-self. I-self refers to a subject who is a knower and an actor-agent, while Me-self refers to an object that is something already known. Furthermore, I-self is said to consist of "self-awareness" and "self-agency", whilst Me-self is composed of "material me", a "social me", and a "spiritual me". Other theorists, Phelps (2015) reports, view 'self' as consisting of "individual self", a "relational self" and a "collective self", and that these three representations of 'self' are believed to coexist within the same individual. Clearly, such a conception of self is reminiscent of 'personality'.

Revelle and Condon (2015:70) define personality as a description and explanation of "the coherent patterning over time and space of affects, cognitions, desires and the resulting behaviours that an individual experiences and expresses". Similarly, DeYoung (2015:33) conceives of personality as a description of "the array of constructs that identify variables in which individuals differ" and states that the term "also refers to the specific mental organisations and processes that produce an individual's characteristic patterns of behaviour and experience". DeYoung makes a distinction between interpersonal or between-person differences, and intrapersonal or within-person differences. The former can be equated to Phelps' (2015) relational self, and the latter to individual self. However, Revelle and Condon (2015) assert that in addition to a person differing from others, which is also called "a-between-individuals difference" (reminiscent of Phelps' relational self), a person may differ from a group of individuals, which is termed "an-amongst-individuals difference" (similar to Phelps' collective self).

No one individual supervisor could be said to think, feel, or act the same way in relation to the same issue all the time – effectively, people differ from themselves. This is different from interpersonal difference or relational self where one supervisor differs from the other, perhaps on account of personality traits. Clearly, personality is perceived in terms of a range of behaviours and experiences, differently expressed according to context. This leads to consideration of personality traits, the relevance

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of which in supervision are tempered by the three types of difference identified above (interpersonal, intrapersonal and inter-group).

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Personality traits are defined by DeYoung (2015:33) as “probabilistic descriptions of relatively stable patterns of emotion, motivation, cognition, and behaviour, in response to classes of stimuli that have been present in human cultures over evolutionary time”. This definition is similar to that proposed by Phelps (2015:558), who contends that personality traits are “a collection of reactions or responses bound by some kind of unity which permits the responses to be gathered under one term”. These definitions suggest the possibility of predicting the state towards which an individual will gravitate. In other words, based on the supervisor’s personality trait(s), it is possible to predict how a student or the supervision process would be handled by the supervisor. Although the emphasis here is on the supervisor, it should also be remembered that the student’s personality traits are an important factor in the supervisor’s behaviour – that behaviour is also interactional. It is vital therefore to be aware of the different personality traits that might influence the handling of a supervision process.

Personality traits are organised into hierarchical levels where the highest order (or metatraits) consists of stability and plasticity (DeYoung, 2015). The second level, which is commonly known as the Big 5 domains, consists of neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness which are under stability; and extraversion and openness/intellect under plasticity. The third level (or aspects) is divided into withdrawal and volatility under neuroticism; compassion and politeness under agreeableness; industriousness and orderliness under conscientiousness; enthusiasm and assertiveness under extraversion; and openness and intellect under openness/intellect. The fourth level (also known as facets) further divides each aspect into an unknown number of facets (DeYoung, 2015) (see Figure 1).

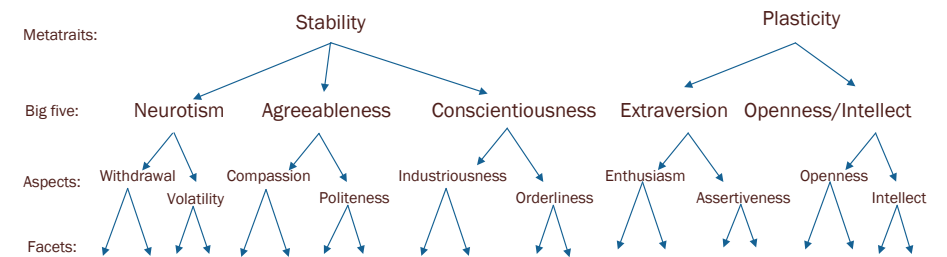


FIGURE 1 Hierarchy of personality traits (Adapted from DeYoung, 2015)

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Dealing first with the metatraits, stability and plasticity, they respectively function to protect goals, interpretations and strategies from disruption by impulses; and explore creation of new goals, interpretations and strategies (DeYoung, 2015). People who have low levels of stability are said to be unstable, whereas those with low levels of plasticity are rigid (DeYoung, 2015).

Turning to the Big 5 domains – namely extraversion, neuroticism, openness/intellect, conscientiousness, and agreeableness – the following are the related behavioural tendencies. To have an extroversion trait means that an individual is marked with behavioural exploration and engagement with specific rewards (DeYoung, 2015). Liu, Liao and Liao (2014:1100) describe extraversion as “the tendency to be talkative and sociable”. Liu et al. (2015:1100), in their study of the influence of prohibitive voice on proactive personality traits of extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, assert that “more than introverts, extroverts are able to handle the expression of change-oriented ideas and suggestions”. Those with low levels of extroversion are said to be reserved. In contrast to extroversion, neuroticism marks an individual with defensive responses to uncertainty, threat and punishment (DeYoung, 2015). An individual with a short supply of the neuroticism trait is said to be unflappable. Furthermore, openness/intellect traits indicate an individual with a positive orientation to cognitive exploration and engagement with information. When in short supply, such a person is unimaginative (DeYoung, 2015). Possession of a conscientious trait means that a person is concerned with “protection of non-immediate or abstract goals and strategies from disruption”, the lack of which means that a person is unreliable. Agreeableness refers to ready engagement in altruism and cooperation, which means that an individual coordinates goals, interpretations, and strategies with those of others (DeYoung, 2015).

The next level to the Big 5 domain in the hierarchy of personality traits is the aspects, comprising (as noted above) withdrawal and volatility, compassion and politeness, industriousness and orderliness, enthusiasm and assertiveness, and intellect and openness.

TABLE 1 Hierarchy of personality traits: the aspects (Adapted from DeYoung, 2015)

ASPECTS	Behavioural orientation of individual	
	Possessing trait	Trait at low levels
Withdrawal	Passive avoidance through “inhibition of goals, interpretations and strategies, in response to uncertainty or error” (DeYoung, 2015: 42).	Self-assured or confident
Volatility	Active defence to avoid or eliminate threats.	Even-tempered

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Compassion	Engagement in “emotional attachment to and concern for others” (DeYoung, 2015:42).	Callous
Politeness	Engagement in “suppression and avoidance of aggressive or non-violating impulses and strategies” (DeYoung, 2015:42).	Tendency to being belligerent
Industriousness	Orientation towards prioritising non-immediate goals.	Undisciplined
Orderliness	Engagement in “avoidance of entropy by following rules set by self or others” (DeYoung, 2015:42).	Disorganised
Enthusiasm	Possessing consummatory reward sensitivity – experiencing enjoyment of actual or imagined goal attainment.	Unenthusiastic
Assertiveness	Possessing incentive reward sensitivity – a drive towards goals (DeYoung, 2015). Liu et al. (2014) associate assertiveness with extroversion.	Submissive
Intellect	Capacity for “detection of logical or causal patterns in abstract and semantic information” (DeYoung, 2015:42).	Lacking ability to think and reason
Openness	Engagement in “detection of spatial and temporal correlational patterns in sensory and perceptual information” (DeYoung, 2015:42).	Unobservant individual

Barrick and Mount (1991), in their study about personality dimensions and job performance, found that extroversion was a predictor for occupations involving social interaction. Applying an insight such as this to supervision, it is evident that the personality of the supervisor is most likely to impinge on their relationship with a student. For example, an extrovert is likely to lead the supervision discussions and bombard the student with a lot of information, with relatively less time spent listening to a student. In contrast, an introverted supervisor is likely to expect a student to provide more information and only come into the discussion when invited.

It should now be clear that a supervisor would handle supervision according to the distribution of personality traits that has been discussed above. Unmistakably, these traits, as explained here, indicate how, based on personality trait(s), different supervisors are likely to handle supervision.

The focus on the personality traits of the supervisor in this chapter is important in understanding the postgraduate relationship, given the unequal power relations that frequently characterise the supervision process. However, it is acknowledged that the personality traits of the students are often an equally important consideration.

APPROACHES TO SUPERVISION

Shifting the focus of this discussion from personality traits to approaches to supervision, Lee (2007) calls for indicators of supervisor predisposition for encouragement, facilitation of learning, resourcefulness, and commitment to students – all of which,

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arguably, should be visible in either an introvert or extrovert personality. Travelling the journey of doctoral studies, which in many instances is a lonely one for a student, requires the occasional infusion of encouragement from the supervisor. Similarly, the whole undertaking is also a learning process for the student as they are inducted into the world of research. The supervisor must facilitate that learning and at the same time be a resource. This calls for explicit commitment from the supervisor – commitment being one of the personality traits identified above.

It should be noted that the indicators of supervisor predisposition that Lee (2007) postulates imply student-supervisor power relations. The supervisor, if viewed as the provider of encouragement, facilitator of learning, and a resource, has the potential to wield undue power over the student. However, the supervisor needs to guard against being fixated on the persistence of these aspects of supervision. As the student develops their capacity for critical thinking and independent learning it may appear as a threat to a supervisor. This eventually may be interpreted in terms of the earlier discussion about the personality of a supervisor and, perhaps, that of the student as well. Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (1997) suggest that a clash may be inevitable where, for instance, the student is too dependent or too independent of a supervisor who may have expected the opposite.

Lee (2007) proposes that there are five main approaches to supervision and that expert supervisors are able to navigate between these, based on the needs of student and the research project. The five approaches are enculturation, functional, critical thinking, emancipation and relationship development, and are described as follows.

Enculturation: the supervisor, who often acts as a gatekeeper, diagnoses deficiencies to be remedied and, based on these, nurtures the student.

Functional: the most prominent activity is the rational movement through tasks, and the student is expected to obey the direction given by the supervisor, as in a project management situation.

Critical: the focus is on the development of disciplinary scepticism in the student.

Emancipation: requires a supervisor who is a facilitator to mentor the student for the benefit of the student's personal growth.

Relationship development: is concerned with fostering emotional intelligence and personal awareness, and managing conflict. The supervisor needs to be emotionally intelligent and have a range of experiences to draw upon to assist the student in their development (Lee, 2007).

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It is my contention that these approaches to supervision mimic the theoretical traditions of research. Enculturation and functional approaches sit comfortably within positivist philosophy, where the supervisor is an expert who must replicate that expertise in the student (see Canagarajah, 1999). Such expertise is often understood to be factually or empirically evident in the accomplishments of a supervisor in academia. It is therefore expected of a student to follow the lead and the directives of the apparently knowing supervisor. On the other hand, the critical and emancipatory approaches (amongst others) critique the positivist stance by shifting the focus to a student who is encouraged to construct knowledge and develop independent thought.

Wadee, Keane, Dietz and Hay (2010) propose a three-dimensional approach to PhD support consisting of supervision, mentoring and coaching. Supervision is seen as “task focused, formal, time efficient, agreement oriented where interaction is formal and requires formalised commitment”, whilst the “mentoring approach is more holistic and takes into account the mentor’s own experience and desire to see the student succeed” (Wadee et al, 2010:91). On the other hand, coaching “promotes independence, reflection and self-directed action – all of which are essential for an emerging researcher” (Wadee et al., 2010:91). Wadee et al. (ibid) propose that a PhD supervisor should be able to integrate the three roles.

As students are inducted into the discourse and narratives of academia, one should not forget that it is a learning curve which may be quite overwhelming. A supervisor should therefore provide pastoral care which should settle a student’s anxieties. In this respect, it is imperative that the supervisor locates the student in the context of learning, rather than of expert – the latter possibly being responsible for unrealistic postgraduate performance expectations.

In that light, a supervisor who provides pastoral care will soon realise that a one-size-fits-all approach is not likely to be effective. Some students would require mentorship whilst others would be at a stage that needs close follow-up. Indeed, some students may feel claustrophobic when the supervisor monitors their work closely but work more efficiently when given some space, whilst others lose focus and confidence when the supervisor adopts a *laissez faire* approach. In other words, a supervisor needs to take into consideration such things as a student’s learning style and personality so that the supervisory process enhances positive experience. In that respect, Lee (2007:685) rightly postulates that “a mismatch in styles (such as when the student is still dependent but the supervision style is one of ‘benign neglect’) [is likely to] lead to poor completion rates”.

The student-supervisor relationship varies. Some supervisors get so close to students that they invite them into their families (see Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 1997).

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Whilst this is envied by some, others consider it to be an unacceptable practice. In fact, some supervisors believe that, first and foremost, the student-supervisor relationship is informed by the institution where the student is registered and most contact between the supervisor and student should occur in that context. When a relationship between the two develops outside the university context, it is often driven by a specific set of circumstances as, for example, in the case of part-time candidates who are likely to find consultations during office hours inadequate.

Furthermore, a supervisor should be an effective communicator, which is potentially achieved when a supervisor listens and makes an effort to understand a student. Most communication between the supervisor and a student revolves around student submissions. Effective communication, therefore, involves clear and timely feedback for student writing. Wade et al (2010) argue that it is desirable for the supervisor's feedback on written submissions to be direct, fast, clear, honest, and consistent. Effective communication also involves setting up follow-up meetings and the scheduling of milestones, such as completion of research proposal and completion of the thesis. Although these are often arranged by the student, the supervisor should ensure that effective planning is maintained. Furthermore, Wade et al (2010:28) propose that "the supervisor keep records of all decisions taken during a contact session in order to ensure follow-up".

The foregoing discussion has dwelt on the self of a supervisor – the fundamental expectations for a supervisor and some philosophical foundations that inform these expectations. The focus on the nature of supervision thus far has largely been on the pragmatics – the practical aspects of supervision – as these seem to be the measurable aspects in terms of successes. The following section looks into two of the processes involved in the production of a dissertation or thesis. Specifically, the discussion is grounded in the need for a student to enter the disciplinary community, which entry should be facilitated through supervision.

DISCOURSE AND TEXTUALITY: IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

Postgraduate studies, especially at master and doctoral level, are traditionally research oriented, culminating in the submission of a dissertation or thesis. I would argue that the production of a dissertation or a thesis goes through two crucial stages: display of discourse competence in a specific discipline and adherence to the conventions of academic text construction.

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Display of discourse competence

Lea and Street (1998) argue that there are conflicts in student writing caused by variations in academic discourse expectations in different subjects. Lecturers themselves adopt different stances to academic discourses, influenced by their own disciplinary conventions (Lea and Street, 1998). Lea and Street rightly observe that the main criteria of students' success in academia is the ability to switch from one academic setting and context to the other; to be able to cope with the linguistic repertoire appropriate to each setting; and to realise the social meanings and identities that each context and setting evokes. For example, students would find it taxing that on one occasion their writing is prescriptively expected to be impersonal and passive whilst on other occasions they have to maintain personal identities through first person and active forms (Lea and Street, 1998). It must be highlighted here however that such challenges of multiple discourses are typical of undergraduate studies. Indeed, Lea and Street's (1998) research was conducted mainly among undergraduate students. The observations are nevertheless relevant to postgraduate students – the main concern in this paper – who are increasingly involved in cross-disciplinary research.

Since the candidate who must produce the dissertation or thesis does so from the context of a particular discipline, it is imperative to be well versed with the discourses of that discipline. For example, discourses that are specifically for Natural Science disciplines differ from those of Social Science and the Humanities. This indicates the need for the mastery of academic discourse for aspiring academics within specific disciplinary contexts. It needs to be noted, however, that notwithstanding this, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has come under fire for appearing to be too prescriptive, demanding absolute allegiance to its conventions for anyone wishing to be admitted into the academy (see Hyatt, 2005). Generic notions of academic language are of little or no relevance (Lea and Street, 1998). The student therefore needs to be grounded in the nuances of conflicting discourses within and across disciplines. This is important because part of the evaluation of 'doctoralness' (Green and Bowden, 2012) is the candidate's competence in his or her own discipline.

Another way of looking at discourses that underpin disciplines is the communities they represent. It can be argued for instance, that academia constitutes a community which is bound by its own discourses and thereby different from the discourses of other communities, such as those of business and of journalism for example. However, supervisors may complicate the student's reception into the academic community by assuming that they are already conversant with conventions of academic discourse. For instance, Hyatt (2005:340) argues that students often struggle with "terms

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[such] as argument, structure, plagiarism, explicitness and clarity which appear straightforward” to the supervisor but have little real discipline-specific meaning for the novice student. It is pivotal therefore for the student to be inducted into the academic community – a long and ongoing process which, for postgraduate students, is influenced by the expertise of the supervisor.

Given the inherent power relations in the supervisor/student relationship, it is unsurprising that the supervisor may be viewed as a gatekeeper in the context of access to disciplinary writing practices, especially when the expectation from a student is that he or she reproduces those practices. These expectations operate on the level of exclusion as the student is already labelled as the apprentice and therefore outsider, and the supervisor, the expert and insider. Hyatt (2005) proposes that “critical inclusion” be the basis of the induction process of a student into the academic community – a stance which requires reflexivity on the part of both the student and the supervisor.

However, the induction into the discourses that characterise different disciplines is easier said than done. This is partly because, in an era of complex social problems, research is characterised by cross-disciplinary lineages where communities merge and borrow from each other. Therefore, it is a complicated process to settle comfortably into a particular community and its discursive practices. The mastery of a particular discourse consequently becomes a challenge, especially when a student has a prior affiliation to another community with discourses that may conflict with the academic ones (Canagarajah, 2002).

An illustration of this challenge is presented by Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (1997) who discuss the plight of a supervisor who lacked competence in the “discourse community” that the student was working with. The student was investigating ancient Greek medical thought using IT, in which the supervisor had no expertise. These are two different communities of practice: ancient Greek medical thought (which is grounded in the interpretation of ancient texts), and IT (which is modern technology). In order to provide effective supervision, the supervisor had to acquaint herself with the imperatives of the disciplinary communities within which the student’s research was located. In a case like this, the supervisor-student relationship needs to be reciprocal, with the student sharing expertise in areas where the supervisor falls short, and the supervisor providing the necessary leadership.

The manner in which a postgraduate student is inducted into the disciplinary discourse is pivotal, for it can occur in different ways with different consequences. For example, as Canagarajah (2002) implies, the supervisor may treat the discourse as a means of mastering or gaining access to the disciplinary community. In that respect, what

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may be deemed important would be the student's mastery of the discourse viewed as a skill. A successful student would therefore be the one who has attained the skill that enables him or her to operate within the confines of the discipline. However, the consequence of this approach is that the mastery of the discourse is viewed as the means to an end and the student seems barred from interrogating the construction of and the ideologies behind the disciplinary discourse (Canagarajah, 2002).

This impediment is not the ideal situation in a postgraduate study, especially at a doctoral level. At doctoral level, if discursive practices are uncritically adopted, there is a danger of replicating the hegemonies of dominant discourses, which arguably can run counter to the notion of doctoralness. Belcher (1997), in a case study of dissertation writing, illustrates the production of a counter discourse deviating from disciplinary norms, indicating the often dismissed fluidity of disciplinary discourse and the fear of challenging the norm.

In this section I have argued that the display of discourse competence is one of the central aspects for the effective production of a thesis. I have discussed the supervisor's role in ensuring that the student achieves mastery of multiple discourses and is skilled in switching between discourses, appropriate to context. This, I have argued, is central to the supervisor's responsibility to direct the student's induction into disciplinary communities. In the next section I will briefly address another important aspect of effective production of a thesis – the actual production of a dissertation or a thesis text.

Production of text

Whilst the power exerted by disciplinary discourses is acknowledged, it is necessary to bear in mind that writing – the construction of the text – plays a significant role as it shapes the document that must be submitted for evaluation. A brief distinction between discourse and text shall suffice here. If discourse could be said to be fluid, representing the appropriate use of language in a social setting, and thus open to various interpretations of representations and constructions (see Abdul Hamid, Nambiar and Abu Bakar, 2007), text would be somewhat rigid, serving the purposes of preservation, and thus authoritative (see Ntombela, 2012) – albeit that such authority may be subject to reinterpretation over time.

The construction of texts has its own nuances, influenced by approaches to textuality (see Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). When looked at closely, it is evident that every step of the research process is governed by texts – be they short notes scribbled by a student as the supervisor comments on the work; recording of data either from the research field or observation in a laboratory; or the putting together of the research

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report in the form of a dissertation or thesis. All these different texts eventually become part of a whole. In other words, when a student writes up, for example, the interview questions or a transcription thereof, there is a process of representing or constructing narratives (see Scot and Usher, 2004). Put in another way, a dissertation or thesis is a constructed text that represents a certain way of looking at the world – the academic way.

It is argued, however, that textuality, in the context of writing a Doctorate, favours one aspect of knowledge construction which is Western oriented. For example, any form of knowledge that is represented by orality is either regarded as inferior or simply sidelined (Ntombela, 2012). Although there have been developments in certain disciplines to recognise as valid texts such as works, artefacts, compositions, public performances and public exhibitions as partial fulfilment of the doctoral qualification, a written thesis remains the deciding text (DoE, 2013). It becomes crucial therefore that the supervisor adopts a critical stance in relation to both research and the student. Clearly, texts are specific to their context and therefore the student best acquires academic text construction through engagement with the supervisor.

TOWARDS THE ADOPTION OF CRITICAL APPROACH IN SUPERVISION

Knowledge construction in academia tends to be universalised in a positivistic paradigm. In fact, academic institutions are a good example of the globalisation of knowledge, not for the sake of sharing per se, but for furthering a particular ideological worldview (Salomone, 2015). The role of a supervisor becomes a crucial one in destabilising these ideologies in the experiences of the student. This is possible through a critical approach to supervision.

Being critical does not necessarily mean operating within the ambit of critical theory per se, for critical theory is just one of the tenets of critical approaches (Scott and Usher, 2004; Wellmer, 2014). Being critical should rather be understood as being reflective, in this case not just on the part of the student, but mostly on the part of the supervisor (in the context of this chapter). This is in contrast to positivist methodology which always seeks closure (Scott and Usher, 2004). Being reflective or critical therefore recognises the fact that the practice of supervision involves social players: student and supervisor, who are both knowledgeable and cannot accept social action as deterministic (Scott and Usher, 2004). Failure to be critical, especially on the part of the supervisor, most likely results in replication of dominance at the expense of transformation which is at the heart of doctoralness.

One of the principal definitions of a doctoral degree is the pushing of boundaries which essentially relates to the conceptualisation of new research initiatives and the

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creation of new knowledge (SAQA, 2012:12). This means, in the process of creating knowledge, a doctoral candidate needs to demonstrate how the work has stretched the boundary of existing knowledge. This has implications for the supervisor, who must see to it that the progress of the work, from its conception to culmination, does contribute something unique beyond that which already exists. But we need to question how possible that is when operating strictly within the confines of a discipline. Many disciplines have woken up to the reality that knowledge construction is exactly that – it is a social construction which borrows freely across disciplines. This is exactly where critical approaches to knowledge construction are relevant.

Critical approaches have been seen as a response or reaction to the totalitarian nature of positivist approaches, in which natural science is most often grounded (Kinsella, 2007; Scott and Usher, 2004; Canagarajah, 1999). A scientific study, from a positivist approach, envisages solutions that are factually grounded as determined by the objectivity of empirical scientific enquiry. The study would therefore seek to objectify the investigation to the extent that the researcher must obliterate him or herself from the text in order to be seen as what is claimed to be objective within the research process. Traditionally, this has been considered to be at the heart of experimental design in science, where the course of happenings must assume a natural occurrence from which apparently valid conclusions can be drawn.

Because of the historical dominance in academia of natural science, academic research has for a long time been approached from a positivist perspective, including in social and human sciences (Scott and Morrison, 2007). Critical approaches – particularly in the social sciences – have therefore reacted to this, arguing, among other things, that research that includes humans as objects of study may not be approached in the same way as laboratory-based research on inanimate objects. Furthermore, since the subjects are humans who are knowledgeable, just like the researcher, the researcher is likely to introduce cultural, contextual or historical knowledge into the research process (see Ntombela, 2013). The construction of knowledge in this respect tends to take a very different route from that of a typical natural science approach.

It is important to emphasise that it should not be concluded that critical approaches are only relevant to social and human sciences. In fact, even the notion of objectivity, which is the fulcrum of natural science research, is not as simple as normally regarded. Despite the fact that the natural world seems to exist on its own, and therefore can be observed by enquirers who seek to understand the reality that crafts it, the world in which this observation takes place, and its representation through texts and discourses that have been particularised, is constructed by researchers. In

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other words, the researcher who is deemed, in the natural science tradition, to be objective is at the same time involved in the representation of those facts that, in the process of representation, have become the creation of the researcher. It becomes valid therefore to question whether such can ever be wholly objective.

This may seem a bit of a digression but there are reasons for it. The main concern here, to reiterate, is that it is essential that supervisors foster awareness in their students of the epistemological developments underlying normative practices in the enterprise of academia. In this respect, I refer to the possibilities for both adherence to and critique of the tenets of the discipline(s) in which the student is conducting research. In this way, the route to the 'pushing of boundaries' becomes a potentially worthy course.

Most importantly, supervision goes beyond adherence to the norms and expectations of a discipline; it speaks to human relations between a student and a supervisor. In other words, a supervisor needs to be cautious not to treat supervision as a research project where the student is reduced to a passive recipient of the supervisor's input. This calls for the supervisor to be critical in his or her approach to supervision. Being critical in this respect entails reflection on how the supervisor manages the relations with the student.

As Scott and Usher (2004) argue, critical approaches to knowledge construction relate to a range of approaches that problematise the universality of knowledge construction. Critical approaches – to give them labels – would thus include the interpretive or hermeneutic approach, emancipatory approach, critical theory, and action research to name a few. Thus, a supervisor who operates within the critical approach would have to realise and acknowledge the specific context of the student and the research field. Furthermore, the supervisor would have to continuously reflect on their supervision practice in order not to stifle the student with rigid disciplinary conventions. The supervision process would thus be most successful when working towards benefiting both parties in terms of exploring avenues that may lie outside the traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Continuous reflection is grounded in reflexivity. Darawsheh (2014) classifies reflexivity into introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction. According to Darawsheh (2014:560), "reflexivity refers to the continuous process of self-reflection that researchers engage in to generate awareness about their actions, feelings and perceptions". In qualitative research, proponents of reflexivity claim that its use in research promotes rigour, reliability and validity. It is further believed to improve "transparency in the researcher's subjective role, both in conducting research and analysing data, and allows the

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researcher to apply the necessary changes to ensure the credibility of their findings” (Darawsheh, 2014:560). I believe the same could be said of the supervisor in the supervision process. That is, the supervisor needs to constantly reflect on the whole process of supervision so that the student remains appropriately supported in their research process. The same way that researchers utilise reflective diaries in order to enhance rigour, supervisors could also use the same tool in order to improve the supervision experience.

One important strength of reflexivity is that the researcher becomes more aware of his or her actions in the process of research (Darawsheh, 2014). What this means is that, in the case of supervision, the supervisor becomes conscious of how he or she handles the supervisee as an important player in the supervision process. This is important because, many times, the student carries most of the blame for not adapting to the style or personality of the supervisor (Ntombela, 2013) despite the fact that it may be that the supervisor needs to alter, say, their supervision style so that it suits the student.

However, though the researcher has become more aware of self, reflexivity does not leave participants outside as the researcher acknowledges the influence exerted on participants and the research process. Therefore, supervisors are similarly aware of the influence of the supervision process on themselves and on students. In fact, Darawsheh (2014) admits that reflexivity helped in identifying personal traits that could subjectively influence the findings and research process. In other words, reflexivity would assist the supervisor in gaining awareness of self as an individual and as a supervisor.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has made clear the importance of supervision in postgraduate research. It has acknowledged the pressure institutions are under to improve the throughput and graduation rate of postgraduate students. In order to expedite this, measures have been put in place where the burden of effort for implementation, in many cases, rests on the shoulders of supervisors. The manner in which supervision is conducted has thus been subjected to much scrutiny.

I have argued here that the self of the supervisor – in terms of their personality and personality traits – is a critical factor in influencing the nature of the relationship between supervisor and student. However, as much as approaches to supervision are shaped by personality, choices between the possible different roles of the supervisor are also critical in shaping the relationship between the supervisor and student.

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Two aspects of supervision addressed are the provision of pastoral care and the importance of communication. Both activities are important in effective supervision of the two significant stages of dissertation production – namely the display of discourse competence and the production of the text in accordance with disciplinary norms. I have argued that the supervisor has a decisive role to play in induction of the student into membership of the relevant disciplinary communities and that, to be effective in so doing, a critical and reflexive approach to supervision is imperative. Recognition of the underlying assumptions regarding knowledge construction in academia is, I have argued, a necessary component of doctoralness.

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5

TOWARDS SUPERVISING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

The divisions of colonialism have not disappeared in South Africa – they remain evident wherever we look, including in the ongoing disparities between historically white and historically black universities. Decades after apartheid has formally ended, the university sector remains uneven. Inequality between universities is compounded by the inequalities – perceived or real – individual students bring with them to our institutions. Across the country exclusions happen on a daily basis and take multiple forms. In a national context where some get quality education and others do not, equitable access to knowledge at postgraduate level is especially significant. For such a situation to be carried forward successfully, the hindrances to its achievement need to be addressed in as open a manner as possible.

The focus of this chapter is on the multiple causes of exclusion in postgraduate supervision. Just as there are multiple causes, so too are there multiple effects of exclusion -- some factors affect students, others affect supervisors, and some affect both. I am based at the University of Limpopo and this is where I have worked to foster an inclusive environment. In this chapter, I reflect on what it means to foster an inclusive environment and share some ideas on how the supervision journey might be traversed in the midst of prevalent exclusionary practices. In doing this, I will outline some strategies that the University of Limpopo has put into place as efforts to counteract exclusion in postgraduate supervision and the associated negative effects.

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EXCLUSION: A WOLF IN THE SUPERVISION JOURNEY

With more than 50% of doctoral students failing to complete their research within seven years (Cloete, Mouton, and Sheppard, 2015), it is clear that there is a problem with South African pedagogy at postgraduate level. Unlike at undergraduate level, where institutional structures such as exclusion rules, exam failure and other formal frameworks often explicitly exclude students, at postgraduate level the exclusions are usually less clearly identifiable as the students are more likely to drop out as a result of failure to thrive. I believe that we need an explicit focus on what exclusion means at postgraduate level and what causes it to occur.

One of the key spaces of exclusion emerges from the uneven power distribution in the supervision relationship, which can be responsible for actual exclusion or feelings of exclusion and isolation. This situation can hinder creativity and the development of critical thinking in knowledge production and, therefore, can affect postgraduate research output negatively. If the power imbalance between supervisor and student is too great and the student is unable to articulate their sense of isolation, it is difficult for the problem to be resolved. In a very uneven power relationship, issues of isolation become especially problematic.

Harrison (2012) specifically identifies isolation as one of the challenges faced by postgraduate students. Students who feel isolated in their supervisory journey are likely to struggle and their feelings imply that they are not appropriately supported. It is commonly acknowledged that embarking on a new study brings with it numerous challenges for the student. However, whilst supervisors should guide and support the student, they are disciplinary experts and mentors for the student, and, in my view, they cannot also be expected to play the role of counsellors and therapists. Nonetheless, the complex pedagogy of supervision requires that the supervisor reflect carefully on issues of power and help their students to seek out additional spaces of collaboration and support.

Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) indicate a need to induct new postgraduate students into appropriate knowledge, beliefs and attitudes within a particular discipline. At the University of Limpopo, induction is supplemented by research and departmental seminars aimed at providing information and skills to lessen the hurdles for both supervisor and supervisee in the supervision journey. These meetings deal primarily with supervision situations, with a central focus on the supervision relationship rather than the roles and the competencies of the supervisor. In this way, the focus is on mutual respect, and improvement of the supervisory process, and there is a real attempt to prevent the meetings from becoming a space of accusation or blame.

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It is evident that both the supervisor and the students benefit from engagement in this process.

The duty of the supervisor is not only to be self-reflective and consider how their words and actions might be interpreted in an exclusionary manner, but also to play a role in making the relationship between supervisor and supervisee open to discussion and negotiation in terms of their interaction. Supervision requires the development of mutual understanding and trust among those involved. Manathunga and Goozée (2007) highlight the importance of good relationship skills for supervision. They claim that both the student and the supervisor have to learn how to interact with each other throughout the journey of supervision. It is through the creation of inclusive and participatory learning environments that exclusion can be counteracted (Jansen, 1988). This implies that mutual respect, care and compassion between the supervisor and the student are crucial. As the student learns from the supervisor how to go about the research, the supervisor, in turn, should be ready to learn from the driver of the project, the student.

DOMAINS OF EXCLUSION

There are many different foundations on which exclusion can be framed. For example, issues such as religion, culture, and race (Khene, 2014) can serve as powerful instruments for exclusion. Exclusions are often not overt. The small slights and micro-aggressions that can be enacted on the basis of prejudices and unwarranted assumptions rarely take the form of explicit frameworks of exclusion, such as racism, sexism, and xenophobia. And yet the experience of such slights can be extremely painful and lead to the student dropping out of university and excluding themselves.

Having explicit discussions around some of the common exclusionary issues – such as religion, culture, field of study and language – in the initial stage of supervision can assist in fostering mutually supportive relationships, assuring the parties involved that differences are normal, and stressing the importance of acceptance. In this way, such issues can be prevented from becoming a wall between the two participants during supervision.

Exclusion on the basis of nationality

Like other South African universities, the University of Limpopo is experiencing a pronounced increase in students of different nationalities. Furthermore, to attend to the demand for postgraduate education, a number of our supervisors are themselves from countries across Africa. Appropriate, positive and open attitudes in these circumstances become vital to avoid isolation. Thus relationship issues that may arise

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from national boundaries between supervisors and students are attended to at the university in order to promote progress in the supervision journey. Despite attempts to discuss how multi-nationalism is an asset to the university, xenophobic incidents, often cloaked by spurious justifications about acceptable academic practice, still prevail. For example, when a South African student working with a supervisor of another nationality is not progressing well, there have been occasions when the supervisor has claimed that South Africans do not perform well in that particular field. Similarly, South African supervisors working with students of another nationality are sometimes perceived to give less attention to these students than they give to their South African students. Such accusations and concerns abound and bedevil the opportunities that the multicultural environment at the university offers.

On occasion I have found myself supervising a particular group of international students whose English is fairly weak and is hard to understand, as their accent is unfamiliar to South Africans. These students expressed how isolated they felt on campus as a result of their accents. They indicated that when they tried to communicate with other scholars, they were neglected or ignored. They were often asked to repeat themselves, and sometimes were requested to write down what they wanted to say. This affected their progress, and I observed them becoming reserved and not actively involved in discussions. During presentations they received very few comments from other students, which I regarded as an indication that it was difficult for the audience to understand them properly. Unfortunately, such incidents are not generally open to discussion for a range of reasons related to political will and social norms. Many incidents of exclusion and isolation seem to be beyond the realm of honest and inclusive deliberation.

In the absence of spaces for direct discussion, I reflected on how my own practices can be altered to make the environment more inclusive for this particular group of students. I spent some time reframing the 'accent problem' in my mind by reminding myself of the potential contributions these students can bring to our scholarly debates and processes of knowledge production. So I approached them and spent time carefully listening to them, without the negativity that seemed too often be directed at these students. It was heart-warming to see how quickly they made progress. I contributed in some way to counteract their sense of exclusion just by changing the way in which I viewed these students. This has had a ripple effect. As other students have seen me listen more carefully to these students, take their input seriously, ask them further questions and seek clarification from them, so too have the other students begun to listen more carefully to international students and now also comment positively on their inputs. I have now shared my

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experiences with colleagues and the issue of recognising, valuing and including all students has become an item for discussion during our research briefing prior to the supervisory journey.

Xenophobia and prejudice do not disappear just because we are nice to each other or listen more carefully to each other, but reflecting deeply on how to make the supervision space more inclusive for those from all nationalities can go some way towards improving our postgraduate education.

Exclusion on the basis of power

The issue of power in the supervision relationship is central to many problems that emerge (Grant 2003). Although getting students to do presentations is often an effective way to facilitate the development of confidence and to literally 'give them the floor', students can feel insecure in a room full of academics during proposal presentations and research discussions as they are still in the process of mastering aspects of their project. If the environment is not explicitly nurturing and developmental, making spaces for students to present their research will not necessarily be a power-sharing exercise.

Drawing on their own experiences as postgraduate students, supervisors can make it their job to come to know their postgraduate students as individuals. Fataar (2013) refers to this as "supervision relationality". He argues that a focus on supervision relationality can include practical tasks such as arranging postgraduate seminars and programmes to afford postgraduate students the opportunity to work together and get to know each other. By being committed to supporting the student to become a confident researcher, alongside the focus on the development of a piece of research, supervisors can be enormously empowering to their students.

According to Leshem and Trafford (2007), the supervisor is responsible for guiding a postgraduate student in satisfying the assessment requirements of the qualification. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2013) sets out the purpose and characteristics of the masters and doctoral degree. In both cases there is a focus in the HEQSF on the development of a high-quality piece of research, but it is important to note that there is also an explicit requirement that the qualification process be attentive to the development of the scholar. South African postgraduate qualifications are intended to develop independent researchers and not simply to produce a thesis, and so it is important that the supervision process provides spaces for the student to claim their agency.

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Power is an aspect of the supervision relationship which is partly dependent on the context. Ideally in a supervisory journey, the supervisor and the student will have clarity on their respective roles, even if these change as the study progresses. Power needs to be constantly redistributed in the relationship in such a way that students can exercise increasing agency during supervision. Supervising a student does not mean that the supervisor is above the student, although the supervisor – at least in the early stages of the research – is expected to be more highly qualified than the student. But there are instances where postgraduate students are unable to defend their own work, as the supervisor has dominated the work in order for the student to complete it within the stipulated time.

Generally, the supervisor is expected to guide by listening and supporting the student, and the student is expected to take the lead in their journey. Unfortunately, this is not always the case as supervisors are sometimes tempted to drive the process themselves to save time. Increasing pressure for completion times makes this tendency more and more attractive. Other than in certain limited circumstances, it is important that the supervisor should not dominate the supervisory process at any stage of the supervision. Students should be assured that they are not obliged to accept and act on everything suggested by the supervisor and the supervisor needs to actively cultivate an environment where this is possible. The work belongs to the student, and the supervision relationship should be handled in such a way that the student is proud to declare that the work is his/hers at the end of the journey.

There are no simple descriptions available for where the power boundaries are between the student and the supervisor. Making space for the development of student agency is crucial, but the more experienced supervisor might be convinced that the route a particular student is taking is too long and arduous – for both parties. This raises the question as to the extent to which the supervisor should advise or insist on a particular direction or course of action in the research process. In some cases, this is a place where asking for input from a broader community can be useful. Taking the discussion to a group of supervisors and scholars can reduce the power issues and provide a space for clear deliberation.

Dietz et al. (2006) emphasise that supervisors as experts need to lead students to appropriate and relevant sources related to the study. At times, the student can move into unknown territory for the supervisor and be drawing on concepts and ideas with which the supervisor is unfamiliar. There may be a tendency to defensively constrain the student to the segment of the field where the supervisor is most confident and familiar, and to reign in the student who is moving into new areas. Academic jealousy and feelings of inferiority on the part of the supervisor have been at the base of many

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problematic supervision relationships. The supervisor needs to carefully check his/her ego in this regard. We, as supervisors, need to be open to learning with and from our students. This requires a level of confidence on the part of the supervisor and a commitment to the student and their project, wherever it may lead.

Supervisors need to enter the postgraduate relationship ready to be stretched and exposed to new ideas. Having an open and welcoming approach to the student and her journey assumes that the supervisor has a secure academic identity and is invested in growing intellectually rather than in defending credentials.

Exclusion on the basis of personality

Individuals are characterised by different and unique personalities. Throughout the supervisory journey, the supervisor and the student develop strategies for how to deal with each other's personality. How the supervisor approaches, deals with, and learns to accommodate others during supervision is central to good progress. But it needs to be acknowledged that, for all of us, some characters are harder to deal with than others. This is why there are no 'quick fixes' and simple generic 'best practices' for supervision. We cannot simply apply a set of ideal approaches. Instead we need to be flexible in our approach and constantly reflexive about our own limitations.

A good strategy, although difficult, is learning to separate personality from the supervision process. Explicit discussions about how the supervisor and scholar will interact are useful. Overt agreement about who sets the meetings, how long the scholar should wait for feedback, what form that feedback will take, and so on, all help to mediate where supervisor and scholar have different approaches. Meetings often allow both parties to 'touch base' and ensure there is shared understanding. In addition, prioritising of scheduled consultations also models for the scholar the respect and care we expect them to demonstrate in their dealings with us and with their research.

Exclusion on the basis of field of study

Universities are hierarchical institutions and this plays out in many ways. Some disciplines, for example, are foregrounded in national policies and funding priorities and others may be sidelined. Arguably, some disciplines are more likely to offer topics that seem to be more accessible to research than others. For example, it is often easier with topics where data can be measured and thus yield quantitative results, to provide valid analytical conclusions. A further example occurs in a community of scholars where some students feel excluded when presentations from the disciplines in which they work seem to be undervalued. In some institutions of higher learning,

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only research from the sciences is displayed, at the expense of research from other fields.

In a country with very low research output, and in institutions with limited postgraduate studies, it is often a challenge to recognise all forms of what Young (2008) has referred to as “powerful” knowledge production. At the University of Limpopo, exclusion on the basis of field of study is strategically attended to in order to avoid the situation where some researchers feel excluded. To this end, the University encourages and supports every researcher directly or indirectly, irrespective of the field of study, as long as the research contributes to the relevant body of knowledge. Building a community of scholars around an underrepresented field is one way of increasing visibility but this takes time and effort and requires significant institutional support.

Exclusion on the basis of language

Clearly, in contemporary South Africa, issues around exclusionary language policies and practices in tertiary education have taken on increasing significance as scholars have focused on the relevance of current curricula and the ongoing dominance of Western frameworks of knowledge production to the exclusion of other scholarly perspectives. The necessity for most postgraduate students to write in a language other than their own is viewed as a major basis for exclusion which is discussed in many fora. However, my focus here is on dearth of research outputs using indigenous African language and the effect of this on self-expression.

Language has been identified as a powerful instrument for exclusion (Kgosana, 2006). In South Africa the language of postgraduate research is predominantly English, with some Afrikaans. The output in African indigenous languages is negligible (in terms of numbers of dissertations completed). Language Policy for Higher Education (MoE, 2002) states that there is a need to develop a multilingual environment in which all eleven official South African languages are developed as academic and scientific languages, while simultaneously ensuring that existing languages of instructions do not serve as a barrier to access and success. This sentiment was recently reaffirmed by Nzimande (2012), the Minister of Higher Education and Training, who stated that African languages need to be part of our academic discourse beyond the mere symbolism that is currently at play at most South African universities. He continued by stating that we should pass the stage where we are still surprised at how few dissertations are written or research conducted in any of our indigenous languages. This implies that the status of African languages in research needs strong systems in place to counteract exclusionary measures.

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The access to global knowledge provided by English is not to be denied but this alone cannot be used to justify the ongoing suppression of African languages. South African universities have a role to play in developing such languages for academic writing and in making spaces to interrogate the world through these languages. When speaking of inclusive environments, consideration needs to be given to how a person's ways of being are tightly interwoven with the languages they speak. Institutions responsible for postgraduate research in South Africa need to develop the means to better access the wealth of knowledge embedded in such languages.

Exclusion as a result of inexperience in postgraduate supervision

Supervisors, too, can feel isolated and excluded (Ulla and Eva, 2007; Grant, 2003). In institutions of higher learning, supervision experience is highly valued for staff promotion and personal development, and so many academics seek out supervision opportunities with some enthusiasm. Furthermore, with only 39% of academics having doctorates – and this number is very unevenly spread across the sector – there are few academics qualified to supervise at doctoral level (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015). It is thus perhaps not surprising that, in many cases, novice supervisors are thrown into the supervisory process without induction or training and assistance. In South Africa, it is still common for many supervisors to supervise on their own, without any postgraduate programme, supervision panel or co-supervisors to assist them as they approach this complex pedagogy.

Experienced supervisors may fail to actively mentor novice supervisors due to heavy workloads – apart from supervising increasing numbers of postgraduate students, supervisors are expected to excel in teaching and learning and community engagement. In this context, the mentoring of novice supervisors can be seen as too time consuming and as leading to little reward. Although it is normally accepted that novice supervisors will learn supervision aspects during departmental and school research proposal presentations, they are often denied this opportunity as proposals at school level are allocated to the school's research committee members and it is there that fruitful discussions about quality in research are held.

Although a co-supervision model is an effective way of developing the skills of novice supervisors (Lee, 2007), the need to take into consideration completion time limits means that two experienced supervisors usually prefer supervising together so that the student completes within the given time (Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011). Novice supervisors struggle to facilitate research development in their students and this affects progress and sometimes results in the supervisor withdrawing from the supervision process. It is clear that mechanisms to support novice supervisors need to

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be established. One example is the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course. However, while this provides a wealth of insights, it does not replace the need for carefully structured ongoing support for novice supervisors.

As supervisors, we need to more explicitly foster a sense of collegiality. Where promotion and reward systems have the unintended consequence of benefiting the supervisor who elects to work on his own and to focus on getting strong students through the system in minimum time, it is likely that collegiality is undermined. If individual supervision and sole-author publications consistently count for more in the university system, the system will operate at the expense of shared endeavours and collegial mentoring.

COUNTERACTING EXCLUSION IN SUPERVISION

Mabokela and King (2001) argue that marginalisation is not a given in higher education in South Africa. The sense of alienation and doubt that seems to characterise much postgraduate work for both novice supervisors and students (Harrison, 2012) is not a necessary part of the research journey. Person and Kayrooz (2004) stress explicitly that it is through support that postgraduate students can develop and thrive. The University of Limpopo is working towards a humanising pedagogy whereby the supervisor is sensitive to the needs of students they are supervising. The notion of a humanising pedagogy is one which consistently puts the student at the centre (Freire, 2005; Khene, 2014). It entails looking for ways to really see and hear each other, so that both students and supervisors develop optimally.

In this endeavour, the University of Limpopo has introduced a number of structural initiatives. The University's Code of Practice on the Admission, Supervision and Assessment of Masters and Doctoral Students (2013) requires that effective supervisory arrangements are made available to all supervisors. The importance here is in the implementation of the policy as outlined in the Code, because to have a good policy without implementation is meaningless. Vital aspects of supervisor support are thoroughly highlighted during induction of teaching staff. Orientation of novice supervisors, seminars, and departmental and research workshops are planned, implemented and reviewed every year. Courses designed for supervisors are compulsory for all newly appointed lecturers. Regular supervisor meetings are held for supervisors to share their experiences of and strategies used in supervision. In these meetings, supervisors are encouraged to reflect on aspects of their practices, such as the following:

- Is the student still driving the process or have I overtaken him/her?

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- Whose views are dominating the study, mine or the student's?
- Is my attitude appropriate and supportive?
- Am I giving feedback in ways that develop the student's research capacity?

Whilst attitudes to a particular group of students can serve as strong exclusionary forces, there are multiple alternative ways of traversing the supervision journey. This includes developing a strong research culture in institutions of higher learning, and building a mutual relationship between the student and the supervisor. The issue of institutional ethos is key. If the university values collegiality and collaboration, and keeps the wellbeing of the student and supervisor, and the intellectual quality of the project at the forefront, then the entire supervision process becomes more inclusive.

CONCLUSION

In this brief chapter, I have highlighted some of the ways in which exclusion can be experienced by both postgraduate scholars and supervisors. It is evident that supervision is a complex pedagogy which has to focus on both the completion of a high-quality piece of research and the development of an independent researcher. In the course of their postgraduate studies, a great number of scholars drop out and fail to complete. I have argued that we need to look explicitly at the forms of exclusion in order to address them, and have considered some of the key ways in which supervisors and higher education institutions can counteract exclusion.

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6

A FEMINIST APPROACH FOR EMANCIPATORY SUPERVISION

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter queries common conceptions about the desirable qualities of higher degree supervisors and interrogates the conventional model of postgraduate supervision, referred to as the ‘apprenticeship model,’ and question assumptions about its efficacy. In a departure from hierocratic and institutionalized thinking, this chapter suggests a holistic pedagogical approach that combines sociological paradigms of emancipation and feminism – that is, a model of supervision based in feminist, emancipatory pedagogy.

I have had a fair degree of exposure to various models of supervision, having worked in both US and Commonwealth (generally, British-based) systems, and in diverse countries. I began teaching in tertiary institutions during my MA (for an English department in the US), continued to teach during my PhD in Drama (as well as in Women’s Studies, Sociology and a Writing Centre), and thereafter during my post-doctorate in the Middle East (teaching English EFL for Engineers and then a range of theoretical and practical classes for students of Theatre and Dance). In the years following I supervised theses in a range of disciplines, including Theatre, Dance, English, Philosophy, Fine Arts, Psychology, Women’s Studies and Creative Arts therapies; I have examined in diverse other disciplines. In all these experiences I saw the ‘apprenticeship model’ in place, with no other options available – including in theses called Research by Practice (original creative work with a written component) and the newest collaboratively written theses.

My preferred model of supervision, which I advance in this chapter, I call “teaching as supervision”. In this model, postgraduate supervisors may continue to apprentice

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supervisees but would also demonstrate, in the course of their supervision, best teaching practices through feminist pedagogy.

Egalitarian and emancipatory models of supervision aim to meet students 'where they live', in their own cultural and educational contexts. The South African educational context (SAQA, 2007) continues to be complicated by currents of colonialism, racial and class segregation, and ongoing ruptures between what Bourdieu (1986) calls "economic, social and cultural capital", in which whole generations have been deprived of quality education. Feminist pedagogies share a great deal in terms of intentions with liberatory pedagogies. Thus a feminist perspective of supervision that remains conscious of indigeneity can be organically aligned with and incorporated into any discipline's teaching, in order to enhance social inclusion in the classroom and supervision more generally.

TRADITIONAL MODELS OF SUPERVISION

The conventional concept of supervisors in universities reflects the thinking that tertiary teachers are fundamentally identical to supervisors, that tertiary employment qualifies a person for both, and that the completion of a doctorate guarantees supervisory capability. In my experience, however, lecturers with doctorates are not necessarily qualified to supervise higher degrees.

A number of factors stand in the way of successful postgraduate supervision, the responsibility for which cannot in all cases be laid at the feet of the supervisor. Significantly, students who achieve above average marks for Bachelor degrees or a BA with Honours, or who excel at undergraduate learning, cannot be assumed to be the "'always/already' autonomous student" (Manathunga, 2007:207).

Moreover, undergraduate and postgraduate learning are not the same, and not only because the economic outcome of the process is different. In fact, the economic outcome could be said to be different because of the change in 'terrain'—higher 'mountains' of learning to scale, deeper 'seas' of theory to navigate, and, on the whole, a more complex conceptualization of what constitutes an appropriate 'territory': the subject and method of research discovery. While undergraduate learning is customarily achieved as one of a group, postgraduate learning typically takes place in a more isolated context. These differences add to the complexity of the underlying assumptions that inform views regarding preparedness for postgraduate learning and teaching.

The apprenticeship model of postgraduate supervision is arguably old-fashioned, patriarchal and predicated on educators' personal experiences. In this construction,

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postgraduate students depend upon a quasi-parental relationship, defined by the unequal power of the participants in terms of their status, authority and/or knowledge. Thus postgraduate students whose apprenticeship in postgraduate research was successful (generally as a result of personal chemistry and supervisory support) might fruitfully adopt and replicate the apprenticeship model when they themselves supervise, while students whose experiences were unsuccessful are at a disadvantage in that they do not have a positive role model for supervision.

Bitzer and Abertyn (2011:3, citing de Beer and Mason, 2009) critique the conventional mode of supervision – the ‘apprenticeship model’ – *qua* convention. The familiar model of postgraduate supervision ‘apprentices’ a postgraduate candidate to an individual (in the guise of the supervisor) who is presumably more knowledgeable in the area of scholarship, without acknowledgment for either party that an apprenticeship is taking place or how it is to proceed. Whilst the apprenticeship model could be condemned as egotistical – the making of a ‘Little Me’ – it remains embedded in academia, with the supervisor’s nexus of power defined by greater status, authority and/or knowledge – what Bourdieu (1986) calls “symbolic capital”.

The underlying assumption remains that a one-on-one approach is most beneficial for the student (as supervision is individualized and presumably customized) and most lucrative for the institution (as fewer faculty members must be employed for its operation). Thus, although the institution derives all (or most) of the economic benefits of postgraduate education, responsibility for success typically remains the supervisor’s. Supervisors become active, authoritarian subjects and postgraduate students can appear to be almost passive, disempowered objects. This may be true even with viable apprenticeships.

Significantly, not all students reach the goal of completion of their doctoral studies. Just as students do not necessarily think through the ramifications of pursuing higher degrees, administrators and educators may not ensure appropriate conditions for offering those degrees. For many reasons, postgraduate students may be inadequately, poorly or thoughtlessly supervised – or not supervised at all, an absence Ward and West (2008) find preferable.

At the risk of generalizing, the patriarchal structure of the university system (like the hospital system) is over-determined as patriarchal, a state of being that provides a frame, if not the whole picture, which is male dominated, linear and paternalistic. Reification of a masculine mentor-apprentice relationship within such a structure seems to reflect the existing environment. Disconcertingly, the more the pattern is repeated, the more difficult it becomes to subvert the structure.

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The formula's repetition is seen as part of its success as, putting aside disciplinary specialization, there is a specific formal pattern in a written thesis that stands as the final result of most supervision. I do not challenge this obvious outcome, but suggest that the formal object, the thesis, is only one outcome. I would argue that the more significant and useful outcome is the process of creating a doctoral scholar – a student, a teacher, a thinker. This position aligns with Lee's (2007) proposal that 'doctoralness' is a specific phenomenon and the appropriate goal of the supervision process.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO SUPERVISION

Johnson, Lee and Green (2000:61) argue that postgraduate education has been inadequately examined and new approaches are necessary. Alternatives to the apprenticeship model are not well known or practised (*ibid.*) – thus their economic advantages and disadvantages remain speculation.

As a means of improving supervisory efficiency (see Ahmed, et al. 2010:25-26), Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:4), promote the use of "alternative approaches". Their stated concern is with reducing staff workload, arguing that instructor loads are "relieved" (p. 13) by involving more participants in supervision. I would argue that although relief could be achieved were administrative and supervisory responsibility to be shared, adding supervisors can also result in limiting the ability to resolve an academic appeal, administrative error or legal issue. Bitzer and Albertyn also reach this conclusion (p. 18), yet despite promotion of a "hybrid approach" leave all planning and facilitating in the hands of one supervisor.

There is a fallacy in the assumption that administrators often make that workload translates into a lecturer's frontal or contact hours, with an assumption that equal contact hours means equal work – and therefore equal pay. Yet staff experience workload reductions in varying terms, including fewer contact hours, less preparation required, lowered emotional demand, easily reached teaching locations, or more convenient administration. Equality in load also varies widely among disciplines, ranks and individuals. From a feminist paradigm such inequalities are inadmissible, not only for faculty members who experience them but also for postgraduate students who observe and, by extension, 'survive' them as symptomatic of the supervision process (Kamler and Thomson 2006).

Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:5) call for supervisors to develop "new skills to apply holistic and creative approaches" and share supervision with other colleagues. However, as one who has shared supervision, co-taught and coordinated diverse classes with multiple lecturers, guest speakers and community members in various countries, I

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attest that such models did not reduce my overall workload though they may have diminished the number of lectures I prepared. Rather, they increased my workload as my administration doubled or tripled. That is not to say that shared supervision is to be avoided. On the contrary, I feel that shared supervision is preferable to any model that promotes one individual as the sole fount of knowledge, or that forces a student to adopt an object – or abject – position with regard to her supervisor. The shared governance and cooperative modeling that I propose are consistent with a feminist paradigm.

A FEMINIST PARADIGM

Co-teaching is sometimes utilized to shift academic load, but it can also expose students to more academic staff, augment teachers' knowledge bases, and subvert the conventional subject-object epistemologies of a classroom. This disruption seems to increase in importance when primary lecturers are male, top-down teachers, or are consumed with demonstrating higher status. Students may initially respond with distress as their single, classroom authority evaporates, to be replaced with two or more possible authorities in a feminist, emancipatory model.

Shrewsbury (1987:7-8) identifies three structures in feminist pedagogy – empowerment, community and leadership – stating that “Feminist pedagogy ultimately seeks a transformation of the academy”. Moreover,

A classroom characterized as persons connected in a net of relationships with people who care about each other's learning as well as their own is very different from a classroom that is seen as comprised of teacher and students. One goal of the liberatory classroom is that members learn to respect each other's differences rather than fear them. [...] The classroom becomes a place in which integrity is not only possible but normal (Shrewsbury, 1987:6).

At the University of Cape Town, my own co-teaching encounter as one of two feminist scholars with a postgraduate class of black males and females – secondary school teachers themselves – resulted in an overturning of classroom norms. Our students subsequently reported introduction of a variety of novel teaching strategies into their own classes, including de-stabilizing classes by teaching from behind the students, and moving students around during class. These approaches to teaching demonstrate how a feminist teaching paradigm re-drew students' centers and shaped new ways of thinking about teachers' expertise.

Strategies such as co-teaching depend on colleagues to co-prepare for shared classes, arrive on schedule and deliver their share. Unplanned absences weaken

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group dynamics, the momentum of learning and a desire for learning. The time lost from a teacher's absence and a need to 'catch up' further damages the contract (often informal) between lecturer and students. So, while co-teaching can disrupt the single authoritarian master, demonstrating the diversity of positions that can be taken towards any subject, co-teaching is also more demanding. To work in an effectively collaborative manner, one must tutor and be tutored by co-contributors, modeling the work of teaching to one's students. The rewards for a feminist paradigmatic teaching collaboration are potentially significant for both students and lecturers.

A COMMITTEE PARADIGM

The model I experienced in the United States from 1991 to 1995 was a 'new' or 'hybrid' approach, in which each of four male supervisors supervised the same doctoral candidate one-on-one. This committee of scholars did not devise group supervision or any opportunity for the student to see more than one supervisor at a time – that is, until the oral examinations, when students taught and defended theses of their own choice in a one-to-four ratio. In my own case, the oral thesis did not appear in my dissertation or written comprehensive examinations, but was a subject I prepared so as to lecture my teachers. For this harrowing experience (which was not a *viva voce*) I derived a topic in response to a critical reading from class, citing literature, history and theory from three years of coursework. The panel enjoyed the seminar and exited the room arguing about it, which seemed a good sign.

This model emerged in the early 1990s in one of the 'new and creative' approaches written about more than a decade later (especially Boud, 2009, and Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011), but still drew upon the conventional model – essentially an apprenticeship model transposed within a team or panel of expert supervisors. This model increases the doctoral student's amount of academic and relational work. Yet, notwithstanding the temptation to engage in post-completion sanitization of the doctoral experience (see Lee and Williams, 1999), over a period of four years (including three years of coursework with many more professors), there was time to grow and to determine a subject of interest to both the student and her committee, and to learn to teach at undergraduate, postgraduate and expert level. While a committee system of supervision takes much longer to complete than the Commonwealth system, the combination of coursework and specialized research assists in producing subject generalists able to teach across the discipline of record and, perhaps, other disciplines.

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AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW PARADIGMS

The mandate of the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course is to improve the quality of research supervision through concentration on the supervisory experience as a holistic and relational process. SPS addresses potential supervisors as students themselves, asking them to identify with student issues; to restore and re-evaluate their own experiences as postgraduate supervisees; to explore and recognize their disciplinary differences; and to re-envision the supervision experience on their own terms, rather than as departmental duties. Emphasizing the epistemology of research supervision, the course attaches value to experiential learning while acknowledging the wide variety of issues to be encountered by both students and supervisors.

During SPS, the support experienced by working with other potential supervisors, and working through issues experienced by mature supervisors, increased participants' feeling of commonality, similarity, resourcing and empathy – for other supervisors as well as one's own students. The fact that the majority of potential supervisors in the cohort were current postgraduate students (being supervised by lecturers who were not part of the cohort) gave a sense of credence and currency to the examples offered during the training. Moreover, the shared teaching and learning opportunity – replicating the feminist paradigm – empowered women in the class, both young and old, to speak up before their male cultural elders, to challenge their own and others' assumptions, and to participate in re-directing their own supervision.

One of the requirements of the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* program was to keep an online journal, a means to maintaining open communication with class members during the protracted period between shared classes, of supporting classmates, and of learning from their comments. This also provided opportunities for reflection on personal practice and learning generated from participation in SPS (as reported later in this chapter).

SUPERVISORY PEDAGOGIES

Some years ago in Australia, a request from our Graduate School provided me with an opportunity to collaborate in design and implementation of a new coursework masters. The intention was to cater to students returning from a hiatus in learning who wanted to brush up on basics, gain theoretical knowledge and command higher salaries as teachers, government officials or tertiary educators. While devising the program, promises of additional staff were frequent, but unfortunately never honoured. Fighting our burgeoning workloads, we of necessity integrated the first year of MA coursework with our year of Honours coursework.

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As the core instructor of Research Methodology I invited all doctoral students (including those supervised by others) to attend classes without fees or assignments (although many later requested to submit assignments). In successive years, postgraduate students in other disciplines asked to join this class, and I turned away no one who showed interest. As a consequence, there was a differing multi-level, interdisciplinary cohort each year, prompting an enormous learning curve as I developed a new syllabus and approach for each class. This was one of the formative experiences on the development of my approach to supervisory pedagogies.

Ahern and Manathunga (2004:241) comment on a “growing recognition of supervision as a form of teaching or pedagogy”, called “cognitive apprenticeship” (after Pearson and Brew, 2002). Green and Lee (1995) and Lee and Kamler (2008) also advocate the concept of pedagogy rather than teaching. Delany (2008) comments:

Connell (1985) takes a more superlative approach and describes PhD supervision as “the most advanced level of teaching ... a genuinely complex teaching task.” [...] A somewhat more nuanced dualistic view is proffered by Zuber-Skerrit and Ryan (1994) who suggest that “research postgraduate training is unique among academic responsibilities in providing a direct linkage between teaching and learning activities and research’.

The notion of “research education” (Pearson and Brew, 2002:135) further underlines the effort at stake in supervision. It is a critical juncture in a student’s life, laying foundations for formation of a junior academic and emerging researcher. If treated as a period of education – a pedagogical opportunity – this difficult and often desolate time of unfamiliar administrative demands can be transformed into an advantage in higher education. In such an approach, the postgraduate student becomes

a skillful performer ... who not only knows what to do but knows how to apply that in practice ... who has something to say that peers want to hear [and] has astuteness to discover where a useful contribution can be made. (Pearson and Brew, 2002:137-138, citing Phillips and Pugh, 1994).

Evans and Green (1995:3) refer to pedagogy as the “absent presence” in the supervisory relationship, while Connell (1985:38) says it must be perceived as a “form of teaching”. Gurr (2001) calls for indirect/direct and passive/active supervision, defined in Delany (2008:7) as:

- Direct active: characterised by initiating, criticising, telling and directing the student

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- Indirect active: characterised by asking for opinions and suggestions, accepting and expanding students' ideas, or asking for explanations and justifications of supervisee's statements
- Indirect passive: characterised by listening and waiting for the student to process ideas and problem solve; and
- Passive: characterised by having no input and not responding to student's input

The varied approaches described here may be found in normative practices of an effective teacher who regularly and organically models best teaching practice.

THE EMPLOYABLE POSTGRADUATE

It is salient, at this juncture, to consider why the modeling of postgraduate teaching practice is so crucial. In the US, Krebs (2014) identifies a well-trained (meaning immediately employable) postgraduate student as one who can directly commence university or college teaching with the capacity to assume teaching responsibilities at a level that includes not only the ability to teach in a classroom but to teach a range of subjects in each semester system. This expectation requires that the postgraduate has had teacher modeling, most efficiently derived from exposure to several teachers handling complex subjects while critiquing and orienting students; fielding, eliciting and encouraging student queries and comments; demonstrating patience and enabling student processing; and empowering students to answer questions for themselves and their peers.

Moving from a focus on how to best supervise to how to train postgraduates as teachers, Krebs (2014:1) asks how appropriate levels of training in teaching in a range of institutions can be provided for doctoral candidates. This question is addressed by representatives of all education sectors in Krebs' initiative, the 'Massachusetts Cross-Sector Partnership', as follows:

...[the] kind of preparation doctoral candidates would need [is]: specialized coursework, visits to the other schools to shadow faculty and participate in workshops, and part-time teaching opportunities. (Krebs, 2014:1)

In the United States, the emphasis for postgraduates on teaching as a form of scholarship is considered a given, and, until recently, it was assumed that possession of a masters qualified the individual to teach at a two-year institution (a community college), while an earned doctorate permitted employment at a four-year institution (a university). The US community college system is a teaching-intensive system in which instructors have no onus to publish (but may produce teaching manuals).

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Only in the university sector is research publication expected – and required – for employment, promotion and the elusive prize of tenure.

In tackling such a complex political, economic and pedagogical problem, the Massachusetts partnership established a direct correlation between postgraduate supervision and postgraduates' futures as teachers. The group agreed that supervision includes issues and modes of teaching, and postgraduate students require teaching practice and confidence. One might compare Gurr's (2001) indirect/direct and passive/active supervision, redefining supervision as a means to directive pedagogy and empowering learning.

COMBINING PARADIGMS IN PERSONAL PRACTICE: TEACHING-AS-SUPERVISION

The multiple paradigm exposure I underwent engendered a significantly different and untraditional supervisory practice. The links made to models of supervision are, respectively, "critical thinking, enculturation and mentoring" (Lee, 2007:682). With respect to Australia, Ward and West (2008:65) say that, apart from provision of support services in language, writing and perhaps time management, "there has been little or no attempt ... to formally situate learning of PhD candidature outside the supervisory relationship".

Cognizant of the absence of teaching in Australian doctoral supervision, and the lack of Australian literature on feminist supervision (for example, Brew, 2001), I adopted the teaching-as-supervision model as an academic in Australia, with instantaneous success. My construction of a class, ostensibly based in research methodology, increasingly distinguished by the challenge to question and transform, was not then (or now) common practice. By that time, I had already resisted the Commonwealth-based master-pupil dialectic for almost ten years, introducing US pedagogical styles in which independent learners are encouraged, if not expected. Having learned and taught in a range of disciplines, including Women's Studies, I had embraced the emancipatory scaffolding of feminist pedagogy, in line with descriptions of what is involved earlier in this chapter.

In my proposed paradigm of 'teaching-as-supervision', co-supervisors are invited to contribute, and supervision is structured differently from the traditional apprenticeship model. Core features of this approach to supervision include:

1. Single supervision sessions with each supervisor, as per apprenticeship model;
2. Joint supervision, generally every fourth or fifth supervision session;

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3. Discussion of joint and other supervisions with as many other supervisors as possible, not in the student's presence; and
4. Discussion of supervision with other supervisors in the student's presence.

Not every supervisor will be open to the preceding points (especially 3 and 4), but over time even silent attendance at such sessions can be fruitful for supervisors as well as students.

Subsequent to enrolling in *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* (SPS) training, I found myself adding another element to supervisory practice: Discussion of the supervision with other supervisors, in the presence of new supervisors and supervisors-in-training.

While not suggesting eliminating the apprenticeship model, I offer an approach to supervision – teaching as supervision – which disrupts the supremacy of one-on-one apprenticeship while empowering postgraduate students to learn at their own paces from facilitators and student peers in a safe and supportive educational environment. My formulation of teaching as supervision straightforwardly follows feminist pedagogical practice. The nucleus of the teaching is Socratic, open-ended and inviting disagreement; the basis of the learning involves contesting theories and unseating cherished 'truths'. As Shrewsbury (1987:6) has described it, feminist pedagogy is:

engaged teaching/learning – engaged with self in a continuing, reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change.

Teaching as supervision accords with the US model of coursework in doctoral studies, but includes an ongoing demonstration of knowledge dissemination and acquisition, research, a range of teaching practices, group discussions and formal presentations by teacher and students. There are regular assignments that model particular aspects of potential or in-process dissertation writing – especially the research proposal, methodology and research design, literature review or annotation, and written argument. Such mini-assignments counteract students' feelings of isolation, and of swimming or drowning (as reported by Kamler and Thompson, 2006). They provide grist for chapters, often forming the bases of dissertations; and, best of all, they diminish the perceived size of the overall project by reducing it to a series of papers modeled in classroom assignments.

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There are a number of ways teaching-as-supervision differs from 'typical' teacher-centred instruction, as well as from the standard supervision models. Teaching-as-supervision could be defined as the need for:

- conscious teaching – teaching that is not only reflective but also highly alert to students' varied ways of receiving and processing information;
- modeling – the constant modeling of best practice as concomitantly a teacher and supervisor (see Delaney above);
- inspiring – moving the student beyond the bounds of passive listening to an urgency of response;
- reciprocating – in which the student unconsciously reverses the (single) teacher/ (multiple) learners role by participating in group teaching; and
- peerage – the teacher must also establish equality, or peerage, in the relationship between the learners and each other, and the learners and self.

In the very act of teaching the teacher demonstrates (her own) desire for knowledge and the (switched-on) mode of critical thinking. There are other effects that might be addressed, but these five are paramount. Although they do not currently appear per se in any feminist pedagogical literature, these elements are consistent with a feminist, emancipatory paradigm of pedagogical practice and a student-centred habitus (Delamont et al., 1997:78). This is, in short, a transcendent model: an opportunity for both learners and teacher to transcend roles and attitudes, and enter into a partnership of mutual desire for knowledge. In this relationship ideas take precedence over egos, and thinking becomes celebratory. One could compare the energy in the classroom to an event, such as a performance – the atmosphere crackles.

The potential for scholarly transformation is dynamic. Doctoral students have at times entered classes structured according to my view of teaching as supervision with arrogance and exited with humility, having had their assumptions challenged by bright young peers. For example, one year two doctoral students joined our postgraduate class in Dramatic Theory and Research Methods four weeks after its start. (The class was particularly rigorous, as I had been forced to combine an overview of 3 000 years of dramatic theory with the protocols for constructing research – all in one semester.) Both men were credentialed educators over 40, had taught secondary school for many years, and had returned to university determined to become tertiary teachers by obtaining doctorates. Likeable but closed-minded, these men began to question the nature of reality – in response to class readings, and apparently for the

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first time. For two sessions they deflated discussion with questions such as ‘What is reality?’ They had only now realized that reality is shaped by personal narrative and that we do not all share a single perception. My undergraduates were amused, as theories of cultural and personal relativism were part of our freshman and sophomore classes. Returning to study, therefore, these men encountered something unforeseen – their own learned and innate prejudices and the limitations of their knowledge. (I was not unsympathetic: I had a similar experience in postgraduate school.)

In this model of supervision, even the most able of students will – or, possibly, should – encounter a proliferation of new resources, media and technologies, in which junior students can be peers and mentors. I am advocating something more integral than peer learning (Boud and Lee, 2005) and/or supervisory mentoring (Manathunga, 2007) and teaching-as-supervision supports this interchange. I view this as a desirable outcome of a doctoral process, part of what Leshem and Trafford (2007) identify as “doctorateness”: a time in which a postgraduate student develops conceptual frameworks that become intrinsic to perceiving knowledge.

Lee (2007:691) sees the necessity of retraining and reframing approaches to supervision as part of a reflective, mature practice. Although the research on a range of supervisory models is rich, my own model has not (to my knowledge) yet appeared as an option – that is, collaborative peerage or group-taught supervision in which postgraduate students play a larger role. Bitzer and Albertyn (2008:11) come close, suggesting that “experienced academics could act as mentors within a supervisory team together with the students) and inexperienced academics”.

I do not present teaching-as-supervision as wholly original, but rather as an extension of feminist pedagogical practice, in which students and teachers are mutually empowered and participants are guided in teaching each other. There are similar proposals (although methods are not discussed) in Lee (2007:682), adapted from Brew (2001), in regard to research and models of supervision, especially:

- Layer conception: A process of discovering, uncovering or creating underlying meanings;
- Trading conception: A kind of social market place where the exchange of products takes place; [and]
- Journey conception: A personal journey of discovery, possibly leading to transformation.

I prefer to erase established divisions between postgraduate levels of Honours, Masters and Doctorate, inducing students to take more active roles in their own

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learning. I position students to query and debate theory with each other in a seminar format, while I, as instructor/mentor, intermittently become a 'passive' participant. Increasingly I am able to move further from the focal centre and adopt a more facilitative role. Sometimes I literally sit on the periphery while the argument ensues between students, and do not interrupt except to ensure clarity, or when a class asks me for guidance, or to settle an argument.

My favourite kind of teaching is facilitative, a natural extension of the preparation of minds for education where facilitators empower students to teach themselves. Although they do not reach this conclusion, Bitzer and Albertyn (2008:11) write, in respect of this kind of approach, that:

More flexible and productive relationships may emerge and a more equal relationship, recognising the different expertise and interests of all members of the team. This could offset the power relations inherent in postgraduate supervisory relationships ... as well as the complexity of power in cross-cultural supervisor relationships.

In my experience as a postgraduate teacher/supervisor (a collation I prefer), I deliberately challenge students' mindsets as well as their knowledge bases. I am not so much concerned with what students believe as in pressing them to identify how and why they believe. Often questions prove more interesting than answers.

Neither teaching-as-supervision nor feminist, emancipatory paradigms alter the fact that the thesis and dissertation are still (for most postgraduates) individually written. It is, rather, the learning and preparation for theorizing and writing which are communally undertaken, granting all students increased support at the critical stage of knowledge production. Directive feedback from a supervisor can also be used collectively to enhance other students' work.

The teacher-as-supervision model is not unproblematic. Narratives of "trauma and distress", transcribed in Lee and Williams (1999:23) as part of the "baptism of fire" faced by doctoral students, can remain intact – even with the intervention of peer mentoring, feminist pedagogy, peer mentoring and communities of practice. The authors ask: "Would alternative forms of doctoral training ... overcome the emotional distress of doctoral training?"

My reply is that the most liberating of practices may still fail to relieve doctoral students from the formally isolating enterprise of doctoral writing. In my own journey towards doctoralness, despite three years of continual coursework, my own teaching and a panel of expert supervisors, I described the thesis-writing period as 'limbo' – in other words, banishment to a possibly interminable purgatory.

POSTGRADUATE RELATIONSHIPS: MOTHERS AND OTHERS

Supervisors tend to replicate methods to which they were exposed as postgraduate students (Pearson and Brew, 2002:146). The SPS assignment to interview other doctoral supervisors provoked me to reflect on this, as my online journal showed:

I think now that the relationship between the apprenticeship model and the kind of expertise and confidence it develops in the protégé are related. If one has had a reasonably good experience as a doctoral student, then the apprenticeship model may be adequate and perceived as efficient and even excellent. If the experience was less desirable, then the result may be someone lacking confidence, and feeling unable to supervise.

Perhaps this is a natural psychological product of the sense of rejection or abandonment one might feel as a result of the experience of supervision in one's own postgraduate learning. One could compare similar comments from parents who were poorly parented. These are my own conjectures but, having spoken with numerous students during my own supervision and since, I recall many negative associations with supervision. I also recall the death of my doctoral chair, which felt like the loss of a father as well as a great scholar. I resist the parental aspect in supervision (and in teaching in general) but know it is there, or expected to be there. Being aware of the family dynamic, and learning how to handle it, is useful for doctoral supervisors.

As a woman I find the role even more vexing, as the positioning of women in society remains limited in scope: mothers, servants and sex-workers or, as Sarah B. Pomeroy titled her radically challenging book on women in classical antiquity, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (Pomeroy, 1976). Arguably, contexts for women have not significantly changed in 3 000 years. Citing a large study of York University students conducted by Seagram et al. (1998), Delaney (2008:4) notes that although time to completion does not vary between female and male PhD students, experiences and particularly attitudes towards supervisors are significantly different: "Female postgraduates nominated interpersonal factors as most significant whilst males reported academic factors". As a female supervisor, then, one may need to consciously subvert a family dynamic that locates the supervisor as a mother figure, while bearing in mind that cultural imperatives may precede the family dynamic (Cummins 1996; Sidorkin, 2002; Bishop, 2008). This is especially true in an indigenous context such as that found in South Africa.

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Having been raised with the Socratic method, aligned with “Gentle Socratic Inquiry” (Jackson, 2001, cited in Lee, 2007:689), I am accustomed to a model in which I do not have all the answers and do not even desire to have access to all the answers. I have found questions to be of more interest and merit, and sometimes do not concern myself with answers at all. Feminist pedagogy disrupts the centrality of an authoritarian pedagogue by posing a marginalized, “minoritarian” (Bhabha, 1994) or unheard (Olsen, 1978) voice as guide.

However, there are potential consequences of adopting the strategies of feminist supervision that need to be monitored. As Ward and West (2008) point out,

some supervisors, having challenged [conventional hierarchical] practices and [who] attempted to undertake a more pastoral role, often basing their attempts on a feminist pedagogy, report being overwhelmed by the needs of their students (p. 62).

My own experience is that the female supervisor is perceived as more available than her male colleagues, as well as soft, nurturing and maternal. At a recent conference a male African postgraduate student declaimed, “What about the feminism of care? Women are meant to nurture men.” I disabused him of this patriarchal doctrine (Baum, 2003). Gender role characteristics, common in domestic life, infiltrate the academy and doubly bind women as weak yet simultaneously ready to take on the greater burdens of their students. With respect to the assumptions regarding links between pedagogy and gender, Evans and Green (1995:3) comment that:

... this can be considered within the terms of a binary logic or economy, a structured system of relations, investments and priorities whereby research is valued at the expense of pedagogy. The ‘research/pedagogy’ binary links up in turn with other binary sets among which are ‘knowledge/identity’ and ‘man/woman’.

Pursuing the issue of labour in the university as an elite subset of patriarchal society, the researchers reach a powerful conclusion:

Our point is that, within this particular formulation, a structured relationship may be observed among the terms ‘research’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘man’ (or ‘the masculine’), on the one hand, and on the other, among those of ‘pedagogy’, ‘identity’ and ‘woman’ (or ‘the feminine’). Moreover, the first field of relationships is systematically or structurally valued over and against the second; indeed, the latter field is negatively valued, or positively devalued, in this regard (Evans and Green, 1995:3).

Prior to my most recent training in supervision I did not consider my own approach as particularly noteworthy – it was simply what I did. Questioning its validity set a

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process in motion to acknowledge a distinct and theorized model. And although my stance as a feminist emancipatory educator has long been visible and forthright, I did not apply the theory to mentor or support myself. For some years I have been mindful of how much I give to my students, but did not register that when I am depleted I model exploitation, not dedication. In this regard, I unconsciously reaffirmed negative values for female academics, and did not adequately defend my own time and research.

THE CULTURAL IMPERATIVE

With regard to the cultural imperative, I would argue that the strategies described in my practice of teaching-as-supervision are tenable in diverse regions. I used a modified version of it at the University of Cape Town, inviting postgraduates to join my third-year classes and writing clinics. However, a caution is necessary here. Because of the reverence for status in countries where there is a thickly entrenched concept of elders as unapproachable or uncontestable, this more inclusive classroom may not always be operable. Teachers should be careful not to import a challenge into a culture that will condemn it. More broadly, in line with the assumptions of feminist pedagogy, I expect in many ways to be less capable of communicating openly with students because of our multitude of differences, such as age, status, gender, race, religion, and culture (Baum 2003, 2005).

CREATING TEACHERS

Teaching-as-supervision has a range of possible benefits in the creation of teachers through postgraduate supervision. Amongst these are developments in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching; the creation of mentoring relationships and networks of capacity building; the engagement of students in a variety of teaching practices; and the development of an emancipatory process of academic identities formation, moving the focus for this (at least initially) from written to oral modes.

The terms in which supervision is monitored and evaluated (particularly the supervision of others) can change through the strategies used in teaching-as-supervision, resulting in increased effectiveness of learning and the disruption of the patriarchal apprenticeship model. A feminist pedagogy, like the similarly emancipatory “pedagogy of the oppressed” (Freire, 1977), posits a stronger parity between learners and teachers (or co-learners and co-teachers), and disrupts the focal nucleus of a teacher-guru as the one person with all the answers. Co-teachers in front of a class and co-teachers in the seats undermine instructional authority, simultaneously elevating all knowledge to the status of possible authority or shared

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non-authority. If one person does not singly represent the repository of knowledge, then any person in the room might contribute to, and represent part of, a repository. In addition, learning moves from a dependent mode, taking in and recording information in class, to an independent mode, drawing one's own conclusions, learning to debate them, accommodating other points of view, altering or in addition to one's own perspectives (see also Lee, 2007:686).

Another positive factor of teaching-as-supervision is the possibility of creating mentorship relationships within the class. Senior students sometimes take mentorship roles involving writing and research tasks; junior students (such as Honours students) can become peer mentors both within the class and for undergraduate students. These outcomes build capacity across the student cohort and release the instructor from the burden of holding all the power. Like the feminist pedagogical paradigm itself, peer mentoring consists in slicing through power relations, while moving towards a form of social inclusion.

Some students enjoy taking on mentorship roles (perhaps formally within a recognized university structure) and having the opportunity to relate closely with others, becoming 'authorities' on a mini-subject and engaging in the act of making the opaque more transparent. Peer mentorship can assist individuals to articulate their arguments in writing, thus shifting a student from orality to literacy. As peers spend more time together than do supervisors and their students, the shared student experience has a scaffolding effect. Finally, such a system of peer mentorship may be synonymous with what Lave and Wenger (1991) call "communities of practice", where the supervised 'apprentices' learn in context with their peers.

Engaging students in teaching practices permits them to experience the difficulties (and occasional joys) of teaching, and, as many students believe they will go on to teach, it is fitting that they have such an experience prior to enrolling in a teaching program. One learns best by teaching: discussions about how students have clarified terms or communicated a concept help student to better comprehend the subject. Peer mentoring or teaching then becomes part of the student's identity.

In general, this style of teaching permits and excites open debate between students, their peers, and myself as their facilitator, from diverse perspectives. Their nascent academic identities emerge and form during such discussions, more so than from solitary attempts to grapple with the literature through reading or writing. This emergence stands in marked distinction to Kamler and Thomson's (2006) thesis on doctoral identity as written. I believe it is customarily spoken (during which time it is vetted, tested, rebutted and embraced) before it is written. In part, because

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discussions remain open, with no particular 'right answer', students are emancipated in their identity quests.

In my model of teaching-as-supervision, moreover, students do not embark on this quest alone: they can see, hear and feel their peers' efforts, torments and delights; they can also see, hear and feel mine. I make it clear that I am not there to be pandered to, and that to disagree with me is always good as long as that argument (like any other) is justified. In the multi-disciplinary context, we argue about issues of craft and differing disciplinary approaches. Approach to craft and disciplinary context becomes an aspect of identity in writing, as Kamler and Thomson (2006) confirm. In the seminar room students can take the steps, and make the leaps, together.

This is not to say that every student develops her own "doctoralness" (Lee, 2007) at the same time, or that identities become homogenous. Just as students can develop identity from wrestling with a text and from producing their own texts, they can also generate identity orally, articulating arguments which may be rejected by others and yet remain that student's point of view. Meanwhile, even the quiet or silent student – or the student who has not yet begun to write – is learning and working to locate herself among the voices in the room.

CONCLUSION

This chapter interrogates traditional supervision paradigms, in particular the apprenticeship model, signaling reasons for concern and describing some alternative approaches to supervision that the current literature calls 'hybrid'. My intention is to formulate possibilities of emancipatory educational practices in postgraduate supervision, in consideration of the mandate of *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* to enhance the quality of the supervision experience.

Clearly, attention is required in any teaching or supervision model, particularly when diversity and emancipation lie at its core. A feminist paradigm can be aligned, however, with emancipatory pedagogical practices in postgraduate teaching in coursework and research degrees. The teaching-as-supervision model suggested provides opportunity for cultural and transformational nodes of instruction and learning, particularly in the context of peer mentorship in and out of the classroom, and a feminist teacher's facilitation of socially inclusive, mutually expansive and transformational discussion and learning.

A key aspect of this chapter has been a focus on the relationships of postgraduate supervision. Evans and Green (1995) assert that "the intellectual relationship is at

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the very heart of postgraduate pedagogy" (p. 5), where "knowledge production" and "identity production" (p. 5) are contiguous. Bishop, Ladwig and Berryman (2014) confirm the "centrality of relationships for pedagogy", predicating those relationships on a notion of "extended family". If so, then the core project of teaching-as-supervision is generation of an intellectual community, in which not only relationships between the supervisor and her postgraduate students, but also between postgraduate students themselves, are transparent and openly acknowledged. In this way a postgraduate community of practice is cultivated within an academy that customarily excludes or precludes communities, a community that is feminist and liberatory in nature, and that facilitates a mutually empowering romance with learning.

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7

NARRATIVE-BASED APPROACHES AS THEORETICAL SCAFFOLDING FOR A SUPERVISION PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

Narrative accounts and narrative texts are as old as humanity itself. Stories, both lived and told, are the means through which we construct knowledge, understanding, relationships, identities, and communities (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007).

The use and definition of narratives has shifted and changed in the course of human history. They are found in oral traditions, artworks, literature and orature, teaching and learning, music, architecture, landscapes, theatre, political systems, warfare, and peace-building. They are the means through which human life is articulated, including the “values, ideologies and truths of individuals and communities” across time, geographical spaces and cultures. (Bell, 1989:364)

Narratives can also be said to emerge from experiences in a family, community or nation, where they serve to

mark important moments in the life of [their] people: the experiences in human life that force dialogue, that force discussion and reflection, that place human beings in a social matrix of struggle and solidarity and thus position them to move forward with a clearer sense of individual and community identity and responsibility. (Bell, 1989:375)

However, narratives of identity have also been the tools with which oppression, repression, and colonialism have been carried out. Particularly through the imposition of hegemonic narratives that diminish and devalue that which has been “othered” and, through the imposition of hierarchical notions of identity and human value, marginalised.

The narrative-based approaches in academic research and supervision that this chapter deals with are a fairly recent development. In the last few decades what

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is referred to as the 'narrative turn' has shaped narrative methods (also known as narrative-based approaches or narrative inquiry) as a theoretical and methodological focus within qualitative research (Riessman 2008; Andrews, Day Sclater, Squire and Treacher, 2000). The concept of narrative has also been used in research about doctoral supervision. Definitions and understandings of narrative have come to be seen as existing within diverse forms of story-telling, writing, music, artworks, audio and visual material, and organisational documents (Riessman, 2008). However, as a recent paper by McAlpine, Paulson, Gonsalves and Jazvac-Martek (2012) suggests, the term 'narrative' in academic research can be used quite loosely without defining what a narrative is understood to be or how researchers are positioning their work within narrative theory. For the purposes of this discussion, the term 'narrative' in this chapter is defined as the characteristics, influences and developments that take place within a story or many stories – rather than being the story itself.

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on and sharpen ideas regarding the potential roles of narrative approaches as theoretical scaffolding within a supervision process. The purpose of doing so is to articulate a theoretical framework for postgraduate supervision processes in cross-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary research environments¹ situated within a postcolonial and culturally complex context. The focus of this narrative-based approach to supervision includes the relationships between people involved in the process; the role of reflexivity in enabling insights and deepening conclusions; the change that the research process can enable for those involved and in society more broadly; possible levels of reflexivity regarding power dynamics within research and supervision processes; and activism that may be possible in the research being undertaken.

This exploration of possibilities arises from a reflexive process about my own experiences of supervision – as both student and supervisor – in the South African context. It is therefore something of a tentative outlining of some key ideas and principles, presented as a basis for further dialogue, exploration and development.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The theoretical formulation and analysis of the elements of narratives in social, psychological and historical research emerged most clearly in the twentieth century (Webster and Mertova, 2007). These narrative approaches to academic research

¹ In this paper 'cross-disciplinary' is understood to mean research across disciplines in which each discipline's approaches and milieu remain fairly intact whereas 'trans-disciplinary' is understood to comprise research across disciplines that works to create a new field of work, framing of a research process or method. See Russell (2005) for a useful discussion on this.

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have their roots in the storied nature of human existence, with arguably the earliest definitions of narrative emerging out of Greek tragedy. Aristotle outlined the basic elements of dramatic narrative form as being:

- a representation of events, experiences and emotions (mimesis);
- narrative understood to form a whole, something that reaches completion in the course of a performance;
- a sense of sequence and structure, with a beginning, middle and end;
- events presented with a sense of order through the plot, which is what drives the heart of the story;
- a plot enacted, given shape and life by characters;
- a disruption of the expected nature and circumstance of the characters' lives (peripeteia) that awakens an emotional reaction and moral questions, creating an interesting plot for the audience; and
- a quest for a resolution of this breach that carries and sustains the passion and pathos of the drama (Riessman, 2008).

Narratives can thus best be defined as the characteristics, influences and developments that take place within a story or many stories – rather than being the story itself.

The 1950s and 1960s saw a proliferation of work in qualitative research methods, including narrative inquiry, which began to explore the implications for research of political, social, technological and cultural shifts (Riessman, 2008). Sociolinguists Labov and Waletzky's (1967) seminal work outlined a structural approach to analysing narratives about personal experiences. Building on Aristotelian ideas, they argued that there are six elements to a fully formed narrative – although not all accounts contain all these elements, and they may occur in varying sequences. The elements they identified were:

- an abstract (summary and/or point of the story);
- orientation (to time, place, characters, situation);
- complicating action (the event sequence, or plot, usually with a crisis or turning point);
- evaluation (where the narrator steps back from the action to comment on meaning and communicate emotions – the "soul" of the narrative);
- resolution (the outcome of the plot); and

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- a coda (ending the story and bringing action back to the present) (Patterson 2008:84).

Since then, the use of narrative theory in research has shifted and evolved. By the 1980s narrative methods had come into their own as a distinct field of inquiry (Riessman, 2008). Polkinghorne (1988) made a significant contribution to understanding the interdisciplinarity of narrative theory by tracing the development of theories about narrative as separate disciplinary threads within history, literature and psychology. Narrative-based research later expanded to influence other disciplines, most notably education in the areas of teaching, learning and curriculum design (Bold, 2012; Clandinin, 2007).

Tensions and debates concerning narrative approaches as a theoretical framework for research continue to evolve. For example, Hyvärinen, Hydén, Saarenheimo and Tamboukou (2010) published a collection of papers that challenges the Aristotelian-based understandings of narrative as being inherently coherent. In Africa, the western roots of narrative theory have been challenged – particularly in literature (Ngũgĩ, 1986). Postcolonial and feminist theorists have also increasingly shifted the boundaries of how narrative theory is defined (Kim, 2012).

There are inevitable gaps in the way the narratives that frame and emerge out of a story can be analysed in a research process. There is, for example, a performative element to self-narratives that can act as a constraint to analysis. The stories that form part of a narrative-based process are also incomplete due to the subjectivities and nuances of a story of any kind never being fully expressible by a speaker through language (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2008). As Andrews (2010:161) points out, the silences in a spoken (or written) narrative are as much part of the narrative as the spoken word – they are a threshold between the spoken word and the “unsayable and unsaid”.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these constraints, using narrative-based approaches presents possibilities that bring rich and textured potential engagements and methodological frameworks to both research and supervision processes.

EMBRACING COMPLEXITY AND CHANGE

Contemporary scholarly research is in the midst of fundamental ontological and epistemological shifts and changes in which the issues being faced are “complex, interconnected, contradictory, located in an uncertain environment and embedded in landscapes that are rapidly changing” (Sardar (2010) cited in Lyall and Meagher, (2012:609) – making cross-disciplinarity a potential norm within the social sciences

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in the future. This requires thinking through how to develop a level of scholarly and methodological coherence in the midst of the flux, change and shifting horizons of the context in which research and supervision are taking place.

Adopting narrative-based approaches or inquiry for the purposes of a supervision process allows for complexity to be part of the research process precisely because of the way in which a narrative-based approach allows for “a multitude of theoretical forms, unfolds in a variety of specific analytical practices, and is grounded in diverse disciplines” (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004:vii). While this sense of multiplicity might appear confusing and at times incoherent, processes as complex as cross-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research require a theoretical framework that can engage with this very complexity, allowing the creative possibilities to emerge and enhance the research rather than trying to ossify or frame a research process in rigid and potentially constricting ways.

Seen in this way, the “theoretical complexity and methodological diversity” of narrative-based approaches to research become a strength rather than a hindrance, enabling an exploration of issues and analysis that avoid reductionism by focusing primarily on the development of insights rather than on conclusions or outcomes (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004:viii). That is not to say that conclusions or outcomes are unimportant or insignificant in a research process. The argument here is that reflexivity on the part of both supervisor and researcher, and a willingness to approach conclusions via the insights that a narrative-based approach focuses on, could enable in-depth and considered conclusions and outcomes. In this way, insights become signposts in the journey towards defining possible conclusions and outcomes.

An important corollary to narrative-based ideas of complexity is the inevitability of people, events and the story shifting in the course of a supervision process. Notions of change and flux are inherent in narrative-based assumptions, in the sense that a story, by its very nature, involves shift and emergence, often in the midst of complexities. There is also an assumption at the outset of a storied process that the characters, context and plot of the story will be different at the end to how they were at the beginning. As mentioned earlier, within a supervision process, the ideas being explored, the questions being asked, the process of writing and the people involved all reach the end of the process changed in some way by what has transpired. A narrative-based approach intentionally harnesses the creative possibilities of this reality by inviting constant cycles of critical reflection on the process, even in the midst of complexity and confusion. The purpose of this is a proactive engagement with change, mitigating what might become negative, limiting or even damaging for the people involved and the research process itself.

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REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH

A further possibility that qualitative, narrative-based approaches present is employing the epistemological role of reflexivity (Gergen and Gergen, 1991). Reflexivity has the potential to operate at a number of levels in any qualitative research process, but narrative-based research lends itself to this approach in particularly overt and intentional ways. Through conscious and deliberate cycles of reflection during a research process, the relationships between the subject matter, the research participants, and the researcher, as well as the researcher and their supervisor(s), become part of the process of inquiry (Phoenix, 2008). This reflection includes analysis and adjustment of the assumptions underlying the research as well as the actual practice of the research.

Equally importantly, there is an element of personal reflexive self-criticality expected of a researcher within qualitative research, requiring ongoing reflection and analysis of the researcher's own history, role and subjectivities at all stages of the research process (Thompson and Harper, 2012). Carefully identifying and exploring the subjectivities, positioning and narratives emerging in different and evolving layers and stages of a research process enables the formulation of ideas, insight and new knowledge. It also helps to ensure that there is a level of vigilance regarding ethical issues, including how informed the consent of research participants really is and what identity or power dynamics are at work in the research process.

Finally, rigorous reflexivity within a research supervision relationship invites conversations about power dynamics and shifts in roles. It provides a way to address possible conflicts and differences of opinion, as well as a level of personal and professional growth for both the postgraduate researcher and the supervisor(s).

NARRATIVE-BASED SUPERVISION AS A FORM OF SCHOLARLY ACTIVISM

Narrative-based approaches revolve around notions of change and emergence. Within a research process this change functions at a number of levels – not least the personal, relational and contextual changes that the research process itself will enable.

The ways in which research engages with and can bring about social and political change have long been a dimension of academic research. Hale's (2008) case studies provide examples of ways in which academics who carry out social research can be seen as 'activist scholars'. This model of activism is based on the idea of researchers carrying out their work in community contexts outside of academia, with a view to voicing issues and histories that have been marginalised or oppressed in

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some way. Mitchell (2009:100) describes this approach to research and pedagogy as presenting “transformative perspectives”.

While research by activist scholars has made some contributions in terms of social justice and human rights, bringing a narrative-based approach to bear on research and supervision requires that issues around activism and transformative possibilities be explored in slightly different ways to the notion of activist scholars. The term ‘activist scholar’ implies that the activism is being carried out by the researcher or scholar themselves. The communities and contexts being researched seem to be given a limited role within the process. While this kind of activism has a positive role to play, questions need to be asked about issues of agency and voice within this kind of approach.

Reflexivity within a narrative-based approach to research and scholarship, I would suggest, requires that the potential activism of all the characters within the story be explored and invited into the process. This might include research participants and communities that are the subjects of any research and scholarship.

When exploring the potential trajectories of a research process, conversations between a postgraduate researcher, their supervisor(s) and research participants also need to invite criticality and reflexivity regarding how power dynamics, agency and voice will be managed and facilitated at all levels of the research process. This could include consideration of what social and contextual changes the research might enable, changes within the research process itself as possible tensions and conflicts arise, and change to research methods that have been implemented and need to be adapted. Examination of academic and cultural norms that might prove exclusionary, marginalising or silencing in some way should form part of these discussions.

Confining notions of activism to what the scholar or research can achieve is limiting and potentially ethically problematic. Equally limiting is the assumption that activism should be directed only towards policy or social change and transformation. Rather, the multiple layers of a research process should all be included in the cycles of reflexivity that narrative-based approaches require, as they could all potentially be enriched by change emerging from rigorously thought-through activism done with a view to enabling transformative possibilities.

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It is for this reason that I prefer to use the term ‘scholarly activism’² to describe research that has both an overt and implicit commitment to inviting and catalysing change, transformation and social justice. This is because the term invites a sense of the complex layers and levels of change that research can catalyse, without confining the agency and voice of activism to the researchers alone. Rather, the potential for activism lies with multiple characters within the narrative of a research – with the requirement that any activism be scholarly and emerge out of rigorous reflexivity and critical thinking.

OUTLINING MY OWN RESEARCH AND SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

My own research and supervision work operates from the midst of cross- and trans-disciplinary work, straddling history, psychology and the arts. There are both delights and complexities in working across different disciplines. One of the most immediate challenges involves requisite and conscious negotiations of methodological and theoretical norms that specific disciplines often take for granted. I have found sitting in different disciplinary spaces at various times to be stimulating, confusing, alienating and enriching – providing opportunities to expand my thinking, research, collaborations with colleagues, and writing in ways I could never have imagined at the outset of each process. The challenge of seeking a level of narrative, theoretical, and methodological coherence in my own work and supervision is what has resulted in me finding narrative-based approaches helpful in providing insights and a sense of being held (but, for the most part, not constricted) within a conceptual framework.

The common thread that runs through supervision work I have done with students over the years is that the various research processes have explored the storied and relational nature of community psychology work, the generational dimensions of political violence, and identity issues in personal, social and political transition. Themes and ideas around social activism and the ways in which research can be part of broader processes of healing, change and developing new socio-political insights are therefore already present in the particular work that I have done. However, exactly what this notion of activism within research entails has been an important issue to consider, including in the way I approach supervision work with postgraduate researchers, and the institutional context within which the supervision is based.

2 I first started exploring this idea when mentoring Mandela Rhodes Foundation scholars in 2008/9. I need to acknowledge Dr Marjorie Jobson and Dr Rejoice Ngcongco for their roles in catalysing my thoughts around this issue.

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By way of illustration, for a number of years I was involved in supervising a group of masters students in clinical psychology for the community psychology component of their course. After some introductory seminars, the practical component of the course comprised facilitating and teaching workshops that dealt with the various aspects of the life skills curriculum in local historically disadvantaged schools. At the end of the course, each student submitted a research essay that described the work they did and reflected on the relationship between theory and their own experiences in the schools.

That this work was done in historically disadvantaged schools in South Africa was a political act in itself. The term 'historically disadvantaged' alludes to the fact that during the racially segregated era of apartheid these schools were designated for black learners, with far fewer resources and facilities than schools designated for white learners, and a curriculum that was intended to trap black learners into a permanent working-class future. Even though this community psychology course was being run nearly twenty years after the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, little had changed for the learners in these schools, making the use of the term 'historically disadvantaged' both tragic and deeply ironic.

In addition, psychological and mental health support facilities are extremely limited in black township communities, which meant that placing psychology students in this context was an attempt to disrupt the economic, educational and geographic divides that still prevail. The intention was for this to be a learning process for the school learners, the teachers and the psychology students as they engaged in an educational process using participative and arts-based workshop methods in order to deal with psychology and mental health-related issues in young people's lives.

Narrative and social constructionist approaches (Gergen, 1999) were used as the theoretical framework for the course, including the weekly debriefing sessions that the supervision team held with the psychology students. This proved useful as a tool for reflecting on and making sense of both what happened in the session psychology students had facilitated in the schools that day, and the issues that they and the learners in the classroom were encountering in their work. These discussions often revolved around the inter-weaving of themes such as the relationships between social justice-based approaches (an example being this programme) and conventional (often very individualised) notions of psychology; the ways in which power, privilege, gender, and race affected the group dynamics in their workshops; and the challenge of using creative methods in an overcrowded, under-resourced school context.

The activist possibilities for meaningful or significant change and healing in a short-term course were limited. However, one of the aims of the course was to alert students

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to the social, political and economic complexities of their context, and to think about how, as professional psychologists, they could be change agents through their work in both the consulting room and the broader community. The activism was therefore partly aimed at the students themselves.

As the supervisor of this course, I also encountered and reflected on a number of challenging issues. One was how to balance my goals as an activist with creating a space within which students and their partner schools could navigate their own paths towards goals they had agreed on. Another issue I faced was recognising that students were grappling emotionally, intellectually and ethically with the social injustices they were witnessing, and how to respond as psychologists, but I had to remain cognisant of the fact that providing answers for students would curtail the possible learning moments and their potential future work as activists. The most useful time for reflection and meaning-making was often in the engagements with students as they were writing up the process they had been involved in.

NARRATIVE PRINCIPLES AS SCAFFOLDING FOR RESEARCH SUPERVISION

The idea of linking narrative-based approaches and a supervised postgraduate research process builds on work that others have explored, researched, taught, and implemented in other contexts.³ However, a review of available literature suggests that previous work linking narrative-based approaches and supervision practice tends to focus primarily on the work, role and complexities of supervisors, as well as approaches to training supervisors. What this chapter brings to this field is a focus on the relationship between a supervisor and a postgraduate researcher through consideration of how a narrative-based focus on the supervision of the research process might enable the relationship between supervisor and researcher, as well as the narrative-based elements of the researcher's journey of supervised interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary postgraduate research.

CONTEXTUALISING NARRATIVE-BASED APPROACHES TO SUPERVISION

Of particular note in the literature about narrative-based approaches to supervision work is the paucity of publications from outside of Europe, North America and Australia. This lacuna is regrettable, given the possibilities a narrative-based approach brings to complex relationships and research in contexts where contrasting, and sometimes conflicting, cultural norms, identity issues, and power dynamics form an integral part of the research process. An example of how these dynamics are currently affecting

³ See, for example, Linden (1999) and McCormack (2009).

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postgraduate supervision is the calls for the decolonisation of South African university institutions, their pedagogical approaches, and of the design and implementation of their curricula.⁴ Inviting conversations and publications that recognise the contemporary and historical contextual issues at work in a research process can only enrich the work being undertaken in societies characterised by marginalisation and alienation and, at the same time, support ongoing transformation-related efforts in tertiary education.

Bearing in mind issues outlined in the opening sections of this chapter, the following section will consider some principles and practices which could be drawn on in developing a narrative-based framework or scaffolding for the supervision of a postgraduate research process. Arguably, there is potential for all the aspects of narrative-based approaches that are described above to be put to use to enrich approaches to postgraduate supervision. However, for this chapter I have described a few aspects that I find particularly useful. This is, therefore, by no means an exhaustive account of the potential for narrative-based approaches to supervision.

PRINCIPLE 1: THIS IS A STORY WITH A BEGINNING, MIDDLE AND END⁵

The story of any research process involves several distinct (although seldom generic) phases. This forms what could be described as the plot of the research process. For a postgraduate student who is able to see a research process through to completion, there are at least three stages to their work, although they are seldom discrete and often follow a circuitous trajectory rather than being linear.

Phase one is the choice of a research focus, the formulation of research goals, and the writing of a research proposal. Phase two is the research itself, while phase three is writing up and submitting the research as a thesis or report. Each of these phases requires different cognitive, emotional, and research skills, abilities, insights, and processes.

When brought into consciousness, by means of reflexive storying and narrating of these stages to a supervisor, the researcher might be able to understand where they are in the course of the process, why they are facing particular challenges, and how they can move through a specific phase in order to reach the end point

4 See www.thedailyvox.co.za/rhodes-must-fall-the-movement-after-the-statue/, <http://rhodesmustfall.co.za/> and www.ru.ac.za/studentlife/rhodesnews/articles/learningoutsideofthelecturetheatre for initiatives that were current at various South African universities at the time of writing.

5 I am grateful to Professor Anthea Garman for her articulation of this principle in an interview I conducted with her at Rhodes University on 7 June 2014.

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of their process. This can in turn assist the researcher to analyse the various layers and dimensions of their research as parts of a narrative whole, identify what their needs are in taking the process forward or dealing with conflicts and challenges, and develop clear strategies as they move through the various stages of their work. If a researcher is not able to complete a research process, this approach is still helpful in finding meaning in the choices and decisions that need to be made in either continuing the story in another form, or finding as positive an ending as possible. In this way of working, the supervisor becomes a witness to the researcher's process and a facilitator of the unfolding plot of the story.

PRINCIPLE 2: THE STUDENT IS THE MAIN CHARACTER AND HER RESEARCH SHAPES THE PLOT

A research story has a number of characters, particularly if it involves any form of interviews or engagements with groups or communities. However, when applying a narrative-based framework to a research process, no matter how complex the web of research-based and institutional relationships that are involved, the researcher remains the main protagonist. It is her hopes, intentions, fears, conflicts, and personality that will shape both the way in which the story unfolds and the narrative elements that will come into play in the research process.

Using narrative-based principles brings to the supervision of a research process the space and opportunity to unpack, reflect on, and decide on or implement changes and set new directions. Because of the way in which narrative-based approaches can hold and engage with different layers, dynamics, relationships, and characters within a story, reflexive cycles completed at key moments of the process can prove enlightening, helpful, and conducive to a smoother passage through the process than might otherwise have been the case. Creating space for the researcher to identify and name what has happened, make sense of these events and developments, and then move forward with greater clarity and intention has the potential to enrich, deepen, and strengthen the work being done.

Key moments often arise because of conflicts, tensions, questions, and uncertainties – moments that are crucial to the outcome in the plot of any story. How they are resolved will determine both the quality and the ultimate conclusion of the story. The complexity for a supervisor is that they are both a character in the plot and a key reader of – and listener to – the unfolding of the very same plot. Negotiating and finding an appropriate balance between these complex roles is a challenge, but one that the process of reflexivity outlined above could also play a role in advancing.

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PRINCIPLE 3: RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE STORY

One of the advantages of a narrative-based approach is the space it provides for the negotiating and contracting that needs to take place in the relationship between a student researcher and supervisor. This could include an agreement between a supervisor and student researcher that narrative-based approaches be invited into the establishment, development, and conclusion of the research project.

The way in which a postgraduate student and their supervisor embark on the research process is crucial in shaping how the process unfolds. The plot of the research process will inevitably involve a degree of conflict, distress and confusion. However, embarking on the plot with a degree of consciousness about the narrative ethos of the process could be enriching and provide conceptual scaffolds that enable stressful times to be managed in a constructive and ultimately enriching way.

A crucial step in embarking on a research process would therefore involve spending some time identifying the key characters and relationships in the story of the research. This could include discussions between the supervisor and researcher about their personalities, preferred ways of working, styles of conflict handling, perceptions of the power dynamics at work in their relationship, hopes for the outcome of the process, and the likely trajectory of the story that the research process would seem to be about. Over time, cycles of reflexivity in this relationship would also need to explore the emotional impact of the research, and ongoing moral or ethical issues or dilemmas that emerged.

Ideally, it should be the relationship between the supervisor and researcher that holds the 'soul' of the storied research process – sustaining and nurturing the people involved as well as the integrity of the research process itself. However, the reality is that this is not always the case. This may be due to a number of factors: personality issues, personal crises, contrasting views on key elements of the research, and a lack of cohesion or coherence in the process. Inviting conversations about these issues as elements within a narrative – rather than indulging in either the student or the supervisor (or both) blaming or complaining about the other party – may expedite a resolution to issues and a clarification of the way forward. It may also result in one or other character in the story shifting their role or place in the narrative. This could involve a confrontation of difficult layers in the narrative, setting deadlines or conditions to the relationship continuing, or possibly agreeing to end the relationship. Any of these possibilities could be held within a narrative scaffolding to the process, which could enable a focus on what is good for the story of the research rather than becoming caught up in, and potentially paralysed or damaged by, personal or power issues.

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PRINCIPLE 4: UNDERSTANDING SUBJECTIVITIES AND POSITIONING WITHIN RESEARCH

Narrative-based approaches create space for the positioning of the research story and the subjectivities of the characters within it to be written into a research process, allowing for the individual and social dimensions of the research itself to be overtly and consciously included in the research project. This lends a level of honesty and transparency to the inevitably subjective dimensions of research work. It also allows for critical reflection on the ways in which the research is positioning itself and being positioned, both within its context and beyond.

When the supervisor(s) and researchers in the research story come from a range of academic disciplines, the subjectivities they bring to the research become both challenging and creatively dynamic. How these are dealt with, and the level of consciousness with which the research is positioned with regard to the various disciplinary backgrounds and cultures involved, is central to the way in which the plot and other narrative elements of the research process play out over time.

PRINCIPLE 5: THE ROLE OF TIME IN THE STORY

Temporality is a key concept in a narrative, as well as in a research process. Not only is a research process time-bound in the sense that the conferral of a degree has required time frames, but there is also a level at which the research process itself shifts and changes over time. As discussed earlier, there is a beginning, middle, and end to the story. Acknowledging this at the outset of a supervision process allows for discussion about the different needs that a student researcher has at progressive stages of the process, the different roles that a supervisor needs to play at various times, and the inevitable shift in power dynamics as a student progresses in their research project.

However, the issue of temporality is also one of the complexities in a research process. What a researcher did, found or wrote in the early stages of a process is often different to their findings and what they want to say in the final writing-up phases of the process. When analysed and discussed within a narrative-based framework, these shifts become easier to identify and write into the thesis or research report.

There is also the reality that research participants shift and change over time. People and communities involved in research are not static entities – they are characters in their own stories, which are shifting and evolving and moving across thresholds of silence and the spoken word independently and possibly because of the research

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being done. This reality needs to be acknowledged and overtly embraced within a narrative-based research and supervision process.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to outline and identify the possibilities of using narrative-based approaches to qualitative research as a form of theoretical scaffolding for the supervision of postgraduate research. When a research process is understood to be a story within which various plots and sub-plots, characters, power dynamics, possibilities, and conflicts will unfold, key elements of a supervisor-student researcher relationship have a guiding theoretical framework within which to work.

What has been outlined here is a tentative articulation of ways to address and enrich my own experiences of being a student researcher and a supervisor in a range of humanities-related research processes. As such, my intention is for this to be the beginning of a conversation and a story in its own right – one which other readers and colleagues are invited to become part of and lead into new trajectories in the light of their experiences and engagements with narrative-based approaches.

The risk of using any theoretical approach is that the theory begins to take over, compromising the humanity and integrity of the work and those who are doing it. While I recognise this risk, I still think these ideas are worth exploring, precisely because of the way in which we humans have always used stories to make sense of ourselves, our place in the world, and the purpose of being here. Ultimately, the intention is to story as a form of humanising, healing, and enriching both research work and those who choose this work as part of their way of being in the world.

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8

THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY STYLES IN THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

RESPONSES AND STRATEGIES

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INTRODUCTION

In the course of supervising graduate students over a number of years in a large Psychology department it has been striking how the personality style of the student appears to influence the outcome. Drawing upon aspects of the well-established personality theory of Theodore Millon, several composite case studies will be elaborated in this chapter to illustrate how the emergence of more rigid types of personality formations during the supervision process may lead to complex and intersecting relational difficulties.

In a range of both formal and informal discussions about the significance of personality dynamics in the supervision process, various colleagues have proffered observations that have confirmed my own impressions. Not only were certain kinds of personality presentations easily recognisable to fellow supervisors but also, in a team supervision context, it appeared that particular students tended to evoke similar responses from a range of staff.

This chapter seeks to draw these observations together into a proposed framework for thinking about personality-related obstacles in research supervision. It is intended that this framework for thinking about impediments to supervision will assist supervisors in attempting to untangle specific types of difficulties that may emerge with some frequency in supervision. Although the framework should have relevance for other levels of supervision, the case studies presented relate to doctoral students, as it is evident that candidature and supervision at this level is particularly taxing.

Both globally (Wisker and Claesson, 2013; Wisker and Kiley, 2014) and in South Africa (Herman, 2012; National Planning Commission (NPC), 2011) there is considerable impetus to increase numbers of doctoral graduates, to ensure that

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candidates actually complete their degrees and, as far as possible, that they do so at an optimal pace. This reflects a large body of international research indicating that dropout and non-completion rates for doctoral students are very high, affecting up to 50% of candidates in some cases (Armstrong, 2004). South African students are no exception in this regard (ASSAf, 2010). It is important to appreciate that the range of obstacles students may face in completing doctoral studies includes psychological obstacles.

While it is evident that material and intellectual difficulties bedevil those undertaking doctoral study, it is also true that completing this level of degree requires (amongst other things) determination, perseverance, stamina, and self-esteem management – all attributes that have psychological weight and meaning. As an academic and clinical psychologist, I believe that it is useful to attempt to more fully elaborate an aspect of psychological influence on doctoral progress that has been under-theorised in existing supervision literature – specifically, the issue of personality style and defensive patterns in relation to perceived stress.

While there has been considerable attention paid to thinking about the power relations inherent in supervisory relationships (Grant, 2008; Manathunga, 2009; Wisker, 2012), this writing has generally not extended into thinking about interactional dynamics and patterns of exchange between student and supervisor that reflect how aspects of personality style are implicated in such complex interchanges. Much of the writing on improving the doctoral experience and throughput has tended to focus on skills training and assisting candidates to better manage themselves (Leshem and Trafford, 2007), rather than investigating the kinds of obstacles to progress that might stem from more intrinsic, individual psychological attributes of the candidate. This chapter aims to extend thinking about obstacles to doctoral progress beyond skills deficits and management of generic unequal power relations, to postulating that personality dynamics may also be an important feature to consider.

Based on observations of when and how points of tension appear to emerge, in keeping with Armstrong (2004), I argue that an under-theorised aspect in attempting to fully comprehend impediments to doctoral progress is the personality dynamics that inhere within the supervisory relationship. Applying some of the ideas about personality types developed by Theodore Millon (Davis, 1999; Millon, 1990), the chapter elaborates how particular ways of engaging with doctoral supervision may reflect patterns of response in some students that require insight and careful challenging on the part of the supervisor. This framing of doctoral study problems will be elaborated through the discussion of cases that reflect what are postulated to be typical kinds of personality-style difficulties. It is intended that offering a more

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psychologically weighted account of possible impediments to doctoral progress will complement and enhance existing sociological understandings.

THE DOCTORAL UNDERTAKING AND RELATIONAL DYNAMICS

As the highest level of degree attainable and the pinnacle of academic achievement, a doctoral degree represents something both aspirational and daunting for the majority of graduate students. The increased level of autonomy expected from those undertaking a doctorate implies that the ultimate outcome is very much a measure of the actual capacity of the candidate to perform intellectually. In addition, there is an expectation that students at this level will make their mark, in terms of scholarship, via the doctoral product. Thus, personal worth and public recognition are heavily dependent on the successful production of a doctorate.

Given the depth of scholarship expected within a doctorate, it is also a degree that requires dedication and commitment over an extended period of time. In relation to completion of doctoral studies, the ASSAf (2010) report indicates that the average time to complete a doctorate was 4.6 years in 2006, with Humanities students taking the longest to complete at 5.3 years. It should be noted that these figures represent an average across both full-time and part-time students, suggesting that some part-time students may take considerably longer to complete than the average. Candidates live with the burden of the doctorate over an extended period of time and have to demonstrate perseverance and stamina.

The demands of study often exceed expectations and initial enthusiasm can be very difficult to sustain. While those who have completed the degree may look back on the experience with a sense of pride and achievement, it is generally accepted that the journey to get to this point is one marked by unanticipated derailments and the need for considerable personal resilience.

In addition to the intellectual and time demands, completion of a doctorate involves the negotiation of a continuing supervision relationship. Armstrong, Allinson and Hayes (2004) suggest that the two aspects of doctoral study contributing most strongly to student non-completion are isolation and the experience of difficulties in supervision. Similarly, the ASSAf (2010) report notes that one of the main impediments to doctoral progress is supervision-related problems.

Supervision, particularly one-on-one supervision, entails engagement in a very particular kind of relationship that is highly significant to successful studies (Sambrook, Stewart and Roberts, 2008). The graduate supervisory relationship is often an unusually private one within academia (Herman, 2011; Grant, 2008),

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amplifying the possibility that the relational dynamic between supervisor and supervisee develops an intensity that exerts considerable influence on the outcome of the exercise.

The supervisory role can take many forms, ranging from that of administrator or gatekeeper to facilitator or mentor (Lee, 2007). Whilst it may be that some postgraduate supervisors are invested in promotion of the idea of cultivating egalitarian relationships of a mentoring kind, Grant (2008) notes that a hierarchical relationship is inevitable – and possibly even necessary in this context.

Although effective supervision requires the adoption of different roles on the part of the supervisor and the student at different points in time, the focus here is on the role of the supervisor. In this respect, candidates may require more guidance in initial stages of doctoral work and more intellectual challenge as they work to refine their critical voice for reviewing literature or analysing data. Supervision entails a delicate balance between encouragement and monitoring of candidate progress.

Armstrong et al. (1997:211) observe that “although a balance of support and autonomy is obviously needed, there is often a struggle between the desire for autonomy and the requirements of authority, resulting in tension between freedom and constraint”. This struggle applies to the relational engagement of both parties involved in supervision. It cannot be denied that there is an unequal power relationship between supervisor and supervisee (Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick, 2014; Grant, 2008) inherent, at the very least, in the idea that the former has expertise that the latter needs to draw upon. The importance of the supervisory relationship, together with the imbalance of power inherent in the relationship, means that interpersonal exchanges are significant and may become loaded with a range of meanings.

Drawing upon aspects of interpersonal personality theory, Armstrong, Allinson and Hayes (2004) observe that relationships inevitably cohere around two key dimensions – namely control (entailing regulation of dominance and submission or assertion and non-assertion) and nurturance (involving regulation of closeness and distance or warmth and coldness). Given the extended and complex nature of the supervisory relationship, it is expected that negotiation and renegotiation around these relational poles will be required.

One aspect of personality that has been researched within the graduate supervision literature is that of cognitive style, with significant findings with regard to matching of analytic versus intuitive style and identifying which style is predominant in either supervisor or supervisee (Armstrong, 2004; Armstrong, Allinson and Hayes, 2004).

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The focus on supervisee personality styles should not erase acknowledgement that supervisor personality attributes may play a significant role in how supervisees receive supervision and in turn how they progress through the degree. Lee (2007:687) cites the work of Darling (1985) on 'toxic mentors', including "avoiders, destroyers and criticisers", and suggests that 'egoists' should be added to the list. In this instance it is apparent that it is personality dimensions of the supervisor that are viewed as problematic. I suggest that personality-related obstacles to doctoral progress might stem not only from the supervisor but also from the supervisee and propose a similar kind of typology of supervisees, based upon observations of the kinds of characteristic struggles that often emerge in the course of supervision.

I am aware that my perspective may run counter to the tendency in much of contemporary literature to place greater responsibility for failures in progress on supervisors. This is because, until recently, understanding of the process of becoming a supervisor has been haphazard and under-scrutinised. It is certainly apparent that many of those appointed as supervisors lack skills and expertise of various kinds in undertaking such tasks, including the sensitivity to offer a productive relational experience for candidates. However, I suggest that, in placing a greater burden of responsibility upon the shoulders of institutions and supervisors for student progress, the degree to which students should be held accountable (or not) for how they make use of the kinds of opportunities afforded to them in the academy is underplayed.

From the preceding discussion it should be apparent that I am proposing that the kinds of defences and coping styles that may typically be employed by candidates engaged in doctoral study tend to be a consequence of the environmental pressures associated with undertaking and completing a doctorate under supervision, rather than necessarily intrinsic to the candidate. The understanding of defences is associated primarily with psychoanalytic theory. As Lemma (2003:208) points out, "the core function of defences is to ward off threatening psychic impulses or anxiety". They are employed by an individual to manage threats, whether these stem from internal conflicts or from the external environment. Defences are often employed outside of conscious awareness and can be either characterological (employed more consistently by a person) or situational (employed in particular situations to manage particular kinds of stress). More characteristic defences develop in the context of early relational histories and become "adaptations to particular relational configurations" (Lemma, 2003:203) and typical ways of "being-with others", including, it could be inferred, ways of being in a supervisory relationship.

Individuals employ defences in the course of their everyday lives but in some situations defences can become over-used and rigid. Dealing with anxiety in a

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particularly entrenched manner may be reflected in a characteristic personality style (as will be elaborated further below). As I have argued, engaging in doctoral study almost inevitably evokes anxiety for candidates, and this anxiety may manifest within the interpersonal context of the supervision relationship, given how significant this relationship is in the doctoral study process. It should be noted here that, in postulating some personality difficulty typologies that may impede doctoral supervision, I do not intend to over pathologise supervisee attitudes and behaviour and will endeavour to avoid the pitfalls of inappropriate applications of personality theory. This is an issue to which I will return later in this chapter.

PERSONALITY-STYLE RELATED IMPEDIMENTS TO DOCTORAL PROGRESS

Over many years of working with both masters and doctoral candidates, I found myself employing a descriptive personality typology to frame my understanding of some common obstacles to progress. The personality descriptions that came to mind, and that resonated with other supervisors' understandings, were associated with personality types identified in the theory of Theodore Millon. Millon's personality theory is very well established and has informed the development of a widely used psychopathology assessment tool (Davis, 1999). Millon's theory assumes that personality arises as a consequence of both inherent temperamental attributes and of early environmental influences (with evident similarities to ideas about the origins of defences).

Personality is understood to guide behaviour in that it is viewed as representing "what reinforcements the individual is seeking, where he or she is looking to find them, and how the individual performs to obtain them" (Davis, 1999:333). It is not too difficult to imagine that forms of engagement in doctoral study will reflect this kind of orientation to reinforcement – including, for example, the candidate's investment in acceptance for study and approval of their doctoral proposal, their sense of adequacy of progression through study, their management of supervisory feedback along the way, completion of a final product, and receptivity to the examination process.

In keeping with several other related personality theorists, Millon understands personality to be constellated around three main polarities: firstly, whether one is primarily oriented towards maximising pleasure or towards minimising pain; secondly, whether one engages more actively or more passively with the environment; and, thirdly, whether one is more strongly 'self' or more strongly 'other' focused (Millon, 1990). These three modes of operating in the world, with a pull towards one polarity

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or the other, come together to produce a range of different personality styles and constellations, as outlined in Millon's detailed and elaborate theory of types.

In providing some basic background for Millon's personality theory, it should be evident that these ways of being in the world inevitably affect how candidates engage with attempting to achieve a doctorate, including how they engage with the supervisory process. For example, managing the almost necessarily stressful experience of a doctorate entails both enjoying achievements and avoiding disappointments. If the latter orientation takes precedence, a student is likely to approach their project with greater caution and may seriously falter with supervisor criticism, whereas a candidate more oriented towards maximising pleasure may resist reworking what they perceive to be a good enough piece of work despite supervisor feedback that it could be improved. It is also apparent that in both of these instances the candidate's active versus passive orientation will play a role, as will their focus in terms of whether their own ('self') needs take precedence or whether there is a stronger pull to accommodate to the needs of the supervisor, the 'other' in this case.

Millon refined his understanding of personality into a comprehensive system of eleven prototypes (with three additional severe pathological types, such as a "paranoid" type). Amongst the dimensions associated with a type are functional aspects such as "expressive behaviours, interpersonal conduct, cognitive style, and intrapsychic regulatory mechanisms" (Strack and Millon, 2007:57), the latter referring largely to defences. Millon's theory thus incorporates cognitive style as part of personality-related behaviour but goes beyond this to include further aspects of how the individual relates to others and the environment. It is the defensive and interpersonal aspects of relating that I think are most useful in thinking about supervision during postgraduate studies.

Millon's theory refers to both functional and structural attributes of personality, the former being more context-related in expression and the latter viewed as more fixed or dispositional. Importantly, both these aspects of personality are understood as attributes which occur across a continuum. The "group of basic personalities can be found in normal adults as healthy adaptive styles or in patients as disorders" (Strack and Millon, 2007:58). In the context of writing about doctoral candidates, it is postulated that what may be observed as personality-related impediments to progress should be understood as falling on this kind of continuum, representing points at which attributes that may have an adaptive function in general use become detrimental to progress rather than facilitative of it. It should also be noted that we are all likely to possess aspects of the traits outlined as common in Millon's types. However, individuals may be more or less biased in orientation towards a particular

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pole of those personality dimensions described previously, and particular situations may be more likely to evoke these more enduring aspects of personality style.

Notwithstanding the fact that this argument is based on a tempered appropriation of Millon's theory, I argue that there are five of his personality types (and associated terminology) that can usefully be applied to thinking more deeply about supervision problems and blockages to progress. The five types, together with their healthier bracketed correlates, are Dependent (Cooperative), Avoidant (Shy), Narcissistic (Confident), Compulsive (Conscientious) and Negativistic (Skeptical) (Strack and Millon, 2007). In applying this typology to students, it is suggested that while in some instances a style may be more enduringly characteristic of an individual, in other instances candidates may evidence different patterns of response at different points through the doctoral process (types not being exclusive of each other). Certain styles of engagement may also be more or less appropriate or useful at different points during completion of the doctorate. For example, greater dependence may be common in the initial stages of commencing with a doctorate and conscientiousness may be an important attribute in producing the final product and meeting technical requirements of particular types of degree.

EVIDENCE EMERGING FROM SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

In the following discussions, some illustrative examples are offered of how the five characteristic types identified as salient in thinking about obstacles may emerge in doctoral supervision. Following the elaboration of each type, some general proposals are put forward as to how supervisors might engage with and attempt to address the kinds of difficulties associated with personality-type dynamics.

In the case of a dependent supervisee, it may be that the expected evolution of a more autonomous engagement with the doctoral process and product does not occur over time. Dependent candidates are likely to require excessive handholding and, without clear guidance from the supervisor, to doubt the sufficiency of anything they have produced. These candidates tend to ask for very frequent contact and feedback and struggle to generate their own ideas and direction. They might be experienced as rather clingy or needy by the supervisor.

While cooperation and appreciative receipt of feedback by the supervisee are useful in supervision, a candidate in dependent mode becomes over-reliant on supervisory input and loses the capacity to exercise their own judgment about what is valid and important. In addition to feeling burdened by supervisee expectations of support and assistance, the supervisor may become conflicted about the degree to which the product reflects the student's independent work and about how much input on the

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supervisor's part is ethical. Debates about where limits of responsibility lie may bring tensions into the supervisory relationship.

In a particular case in point a very enthusiastic supervisee made weekly appointments with the supervisor and in between these appointments sent two or three emails asking for guidance and direction. After almost a year of this kind of engagement the supervisor indicated that she was anxious that the candidate would not be able to complete his study without the continuation of this assumed level of engagement on her part. It was decided that the candidate needed to present his proposal at the required departmental meeting, at which point it became apparent that he was unable to respond to questions and to satisfactorily articulate key aspects of his project, suggesting a disquieting lack of ownership on his part. It appeared that the only basis on which he could continue was with an inappropriate level of involvement from his supervisor. He was given the opportunity to make revisions to his proposal, based on departmental feedback but with less detailed input than previously. It then became very clear that he was not capable of completing the doctorate without a kind of 'twinned' reliance on the supervisor and it was necessary for the supervisor to give this feedback to him.

Based on a renewed clarification of what was expected of the supervisee in terms of generation of material and application in his studies, as well as what he could reasonably expect from his supervisor going forward, the candidate came to see that he was not sufficiently motivated to continue on this basis and he reluctantly withdrew from his studies. While this is perhaps an extreme case, it is not uncommon for supervisees to go through periods of over-dependence and for supervisors to need guidance about their responsibilities at these points. In such cases it may be important to identify the over-dependence quite early in supervision and to develop assignments and tasks that will test for and develop autonomy as soon as the tendency is ascertained. It may then be useful for the supervisor to be particularly mindful of reducing supports over time, with the conscious intention of weaning the student of their dependence and helping them to develop greater confidence in their own capacities, even if this process is resisted by the candidate.

The avoidant supervisee describes the student who becomes avoidant of supervision and the supervisor. These candidates may either 'disappear' altogether, becoming difficult to contact or communicate with, or they may undertake to produce material or come to supervisory meetings, but then fail to meet these commitments. With avoidant-type candidates this pattern becomes persistent and begins to set up an awkward relationship between supervisor and supervisee. The supervisor may come to feel as if they are in pursuit of the candidate and feel uncomfortable at having to

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assume an almost persecutory role within the relationship. The supervisee, in turn, may become more avoidant of supervisory contact, fearing chastisement or shaming as a consequence of their non-delivery. Whereas a shy person may be responsive to reassurance and encouragement, the avoider fails to open up sufficient space for this helpful kind of communication to take place or continues in their absent pattern of response despite supervisor efforts to help them to manage impediments. This kind of difficulty can escalate to the point where the supervisor becomes disinvested or exasperated, finding the impasse as difficult to transcend as the student.

I can think of at least two instances in which supervisors, having initially offered extra encouragement to students, have become so frustrated that they have withdrawn from pursuing further contact, insisting that the candidate takes responsibility for negotiating further progress and meetings. In both cases, candidates have been highly competent and constantly assured supervisors that they would 'get back on track' or produce work, but then seemed unable to deliver on these renewed promises. The issue may be one of lack of confidence, but seems to extend beyond this into an interactional dynamic where an inadvertently punitive or parental-type relationship is set up with feelings of frustration, disappointment, shame, and doubt being evoked in each party. It is not so much work avoidance that is problematic but the interpersonal damage that this may produce.

In some instances, supervisors may hold themselves responsible for lack of progress and suggest a change of supervisor. However, if the avoidant tendency is fairly entrenched on the part of the supervisee, the pattern tends to continue and repeat itself within the new relationship. Again, as will be discussed in the conclusion, early recognition of this dynamic may be helpful and may allow for some kind of constructive engagement around issues of accountability and performance. These latter are probably more significant in this instance than the actual content of what needs to be produced.

The narcissistic supervisee tends to display tendencies that contrast with those of the dependent supervisee. The narcissistic supervisee is so invested in their own capacities, reputation and products, that they find it extremely difficult to receive and incorporate feedback. Ostensibly responsive to inputs, it becomes apparent that the candidate ultimately always believes that s/he knows best. Rather than being confident in their abilities but knowing when and where supervisory guidance would be useful, the narcissistic supervisee almost perceives suggestions about changes or revisions as a slight.

Since the narcissist is deeply personally invested in whatever it is s/he has produced, criticism of a piece of work may well be experienced as a personal attack. Supervisors

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may become anxious and ultra-careful in their delivery of feedback or alternatively frustrated about a lack of responsiveness on the part of the supervisee. In some instances, candidates may be so accustomed to receiving admiration and deference in other environments that they feel entitled to special treatment, assuming that certain steps in the process of embarking upon and actually doing a doctorate can be missed.

Both the entitled and the over-sensitive dimensions of more narcissistically inclined supervisees can be difficult for supervisors to manage. In a case that is illustrative of aspects of this kind of dynamic a supervisee began his doctorate with a strong investment in a particular theoretical argument that he believed he had independently developed through observation in his applied practice. Feedback on the initial concept paper was that the outcome of the study appeared to be predetermined and that he needed to be more open in framing and developing his topic. He appeared receptive to this feedback and made some minor changes to his rationale and design. However, over some eight months of working to develop a satisfactory proposal, it became evident to the supervisor that the candidate was so invested in what he believed to be his novel formulation that he could not take in or integrate feedback, nor modify the proposal.

Both parties became progressively more frustrated, with the supervisor coming to a point where they felt impotent to intervene further. The supervisee seemed resistant to undoing what had already been written and his anxiety appeared to escalate over consecutive consultations. Ultimately this candidate withdrew from his studies, arguably saving face by indicating that work demands were such that he no longer had time to work on his doctorate. The supervisor was left with some sadness about the process and also considerable frustration about the amount of time and energy invested in this ultimately non-productive candidacy.

The compulsive supervisee demonstrates what might commonly be called an obsessive-compulsive relationship to doctoral outputs. This kind of supervisee pays an enormous amount of attention to detail, potentially at the expense of foregrounding theory and ideas. He or she struggles to 'see the wood for the trees' and finds it difficult to discriminate between what is more central in feedback and what is more peripheral. Possibly out of anxiety about tackling difficult generative parts of the thesis, compulsive candidates may persevere on particular sections, or chapters, or on more technical aspects of the thesis, such as layout or referencing. They may, for example, become preoccupied with producing an exhaustive, up-to-date literature review, returning to this aspect of the thesis with regularity, failing to see this as ever satisfactorily complete.

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While conscientiousness is very useful, particularly in the final stages of thesis submission (when it is important to be meticulous about referencing and presentation), the compulsive candidate operates with this level of attention to detail throughout the process to a point that they can become paralysed by the sense that nothing is ever quite good enough. Supervisors may initially value this kind of candidate, who seems so well organised and thorough, but may become exasperated with this very aspect of engagement over time as the supervisee struggles to let go of one aspect in order to necessarily move on to something new. The supervisor may also feel contaminated by the student's anxiety, beginning to doubt the precision and sufficiency of their feedback and questioning their own judgment of when aspects of the product are good enough for final submission.

A colleague described supervising a candidate of this kind who would constantly return to sections of work that supposedly they had together agreed upon had been completed. It was enormously frustrating to the supervisor to have to revisit sections of the thesis she had previously given feedback upon and to find that in some instances the reworked version was weaker than the previous one. Although the candidate appeared to have some insight that her preoccupation with perfection was impeding her progress, her anxiety appeared to drive her to continue with this pattern of reworking. She did eventually complete the thesis, much to the supervisor's relief, but this only several years after the originally anticipated completion time. The relationship also ended in a very strained way, with the supervisor feeling unreasonably depleted.

The negativistic supervisee could also be referred to as the passive-aggressive supervisee. Unlike the narcissistic supervisee, who resists input on the basis that this makes them feel lacking in some way, the negativistic supervisee is invested in putting the supervisor in a position in which s/he feels inadequate and conflicted. Ostensibly cooperative, the passive-aggressive response to supervisory input means that while progress appears to be taking place things often end in a stalemate. The candidate may listen to or receive feedback with apparent appreciation but then tends to come back to refute advice or fails to make any changes in accordance with feedback. The candidate is not openly oppositional but seems to always find some basis for resisting input. The supervisor may become increasingly frustrated but find it difficult to actively name what is occurring.

While scepticism may be a useful quality in a supervisee, in that it allows her/him to retain a questioning presence and to engage in debate with the supervisor rather than passively receiving input, negativism represents a resistance almost for the sake of engendering unspoken conflict or discomfort on the part of the other. Again,

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in this kind of situation the supervisor may become both anxious and frustrated, wondering what it is that precludes a harmonious negotiation of the work to enable the doctoral product to move forward.

In one such instance, I became aware that a supervisee would ask my advice in face-to-face meetings and take notes in a manner that suggested a commitment to using the guidance. However, he would then return with further questions, often having asked advice of other staff in the department, and would politely question the validity of the opinion I had volunteered. He would also often leave me with unusually strong feelings of insufficiency, such that I considered bringing on board a co-supervisor or asking a colleague to take over his supervision.

In this instance it was useful to hear feedback from the doctoral team within which I was working, who similarly experienced the candidate as covertly oppositional in work group seminars. It proved possible to point out the dynamic to the candidate as it was happening and for the candidate to recognise that this was one of the inadvertent ways he was managing his own anxiety about his competence. After this discussion we were able to move forward more productively together.

SUPERVISOR RESPONSE TO EMERGENT SUPERVISEE PERSONALITY DYNAMICS

Having elaborated the five types of personality difficulties that my colleagues and I have observed serve to most frequently produce serious difficulties in the supervisory relationship and create impediments to progress, it is important to offer some thoughts on how supervisors might best work with this kind of knowledge. Clearly, in many instances the way in which problems manifest creates anxiety, tension, self-questioning, and conflict in both supervisee and supervisor. Neither party gains in terms of doctoral progress when these kinds of dynamic interactional patterns come to be dominant in supervision.

A first step, then, is for the supervisor to be able to recognise when such a destructive pattern seems to have come to define the supervision exchange. It is easy to see that aspects of each of these five styles may emerge briefly at points in supervision; however, it is particularly when they become more enduring or manifest as a pattern that the supervisor needs to be observant of this. Equally, the supervisor needs to remain reflective of their own stance and responses and how these may be contributing to relational dynamics, particularly in terms of whether they may be reinforcing or escalating the identified patterns.

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I maintain that once it is apparent that the style has become entrenched it is almost impossible to proceed with supervision without addressing the relational dynamic overtly. It would therefore be better to tackle the kinds of concerns illustrated in the case scenarios sooner rather than later. However, as supervisors are rarely psychotherapists or counsellors – although I would argue that they are much more often called upon to assume these kinds of roles than is acknowledged – they may be uncomfortable with raising issues that appear to fall outside of their academic role.

In cases where a supervisor feels that the kinds of dynamics described in this chapter are dominating supervision, a first step might be to discuss this with colleagues or fellow team members. In this respect, the importance of supervisors being affiliated to some kind of relevant support structure or community is evident.

It is then important to think about how to have a non-threatening conversation with the student about the pattern that seems to have emerged and how it is problematic. While raising the topic necessarily requires some degree of interpersonal skill, it may be helpful to guide discussion by retaining the focus on how the problem is affecting doctoral progress rather than focusing on the relational impact per se. In addition, it may be possible to normalise such reactions as a common student response to the stress induced by doctoral study and to the weight of co-responsibility invested in the supervisory relationship.

It is also useful to hold in mind that each of the styles discussed has an adaptive pole, in terms of finding a healthier balance, which could fruitfully be foregrounded. Guiding the student on where aspects of their doctoral practice, such as their conscientiousness, caution, or scepticism, are useful, but equally where they appear to have translated into a more maladaptive style of engagement, may be helpful and less threatening to the self-esteem of the candidate. Such strategies may go some way towards unblocking the impasse without creating further relational tensions.

While this resolution may seem somewhat idealistic – especially given the power dynamics inherent to the supervision relationship and the fact that candidates are in a specific relationship with the broader academic institution and graduate project as a whole – suggest that the framework proposed here could become a shared language for thinking about doctoral “stuckness”. Arguably it would be beneficial for the terminology relating to the five different characteristics described above to gain purchase as one aspect of a shared vocabulary for talking about stress-related states of being that might commonly emerge in supervision. Either party would then be able to talk about questioning the development of, for example, an overly dependent or negativistic supervisory bind, using the terms as a form of

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externalised code for talking about something that might be intruding as an adverse force into the supervisory relationship. In the process, overly individualising and over-pathologising the candidate can be avoided.

My sense is that the kinds of personality dynamics described in this chapter are fairly pervasive within supervisory relationships and are worth thinking about in conjunction with other obstacles to progress that have been more widely documented. Having a framework to think about potential personality-style contributions of supervisees to blockages in the progress of supervision is as important as thinking about supervisor characteristics. The paper suggests one model for beginning to develop a shared perspective on this dimension of personality-related, relational impediment to doctoral supervision and progress.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is important to reflect upon some of the limitations of the arguments put forward. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that the kinds of dynamics I have described may be more dominant within supervision in certain academic disciplines/areas than in others. For example, Humanities students take longer to complete their doctorates and generally anticipate less clear direction from a supervisor than do Science students. It is also apparent that the kinds of dynamic tensions described in the illustrative cases are much more likely to emerge in one-on-one supervision and this perhaps strengthens proposals that both students and supervisors can benefit from working within cohorts or groups (Wisker, Robinson and Shacham, 2007).

A further limitation is that the supporting evidence for the types elaborated is somewhat thin and selective, relying on case-study type material generated from my own and colleagues' observations. It would be useful to determine whether the experiences described here resonate with a range of supervisors working in different settings.

It is also important to note that other aspects of identity and context may influence and interact with personality dimensions. For example, students coming from cultural backgrounds in which deference and respect in relation to superiors is expected may be much more inclined to a dependent presentation. Particular kinds of race and gender pairings of supervisee and supervisor may also lend themselves to a greater likelihood of negativism and conflict or of over-dependence, for example. In this respect, although Millon's personality-style framework has been determined to have considerable cross-cultural applicability, it should not be uncritically applied without reference to social and cultural positioning and conventions.

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I am also aware of the potential problems of introducing this kind of personality terminology into the supervision literature in that I recognise that there is a danger of over-pathologising supervisees, as addressed previously, and also of displacing blame from incompetent or problematic supervisors onto candidates. There is a need, however, to insert some balance into the discussion, as the literature on graduate supervision places a heavy burden of responsibility on the supervisor and has tended to underplay some of the responsibilities that lie with candidates. At the heart of this chapter, therefore, is a discussion of the importance of recognising the reciprocal stress that supervising and being supervised imposes on the doctoral supervision dyad and of the value of finding ways of understanding how such stress may be identified and addressed as sympathetically as possible, with due respect for and consideration of both parties.

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CHAPTER 8 • THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY STYLES IN THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

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9

FINDING A SUPERVISION NICHE

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINARY FOCUS

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Instructional contexts have enormous bearing on the postgraduate environment. Moutlana argues that the fact that research in a University of Technology (UoT) provides a “solutions driven approach to society’s problems ... towards commercialisation, technology transfer application and possible patents” creates an exciting space for supervision, where the fruits play a role in the upliftment of the economy and society (Dell, 2014).

The focus of this article is the influence research supervision at a UoT has had on my career. The account is framed in three sections: the first section discusses the doctoral terrain in South Africa and outlines the context of a UoT; the second section presents my perspective of supervision; and the third section deliberates on discussions with participants at the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course and explores, via a survey, the experiences of supervisors and PG research students from a selected UoT.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

The landscape of the South African higher education system changed with the introduction of a “continuum of institutions” which is “diverse (programmes) and differentiated (context)” to meet the “social needs of the country”. The types of institutions are the traditional university, the UoT and the comprehensive university. The main focus of the traditional university is “traditional general formative and professional undergraduate and postgraduate (PG) programmes and research”, while that of the UoT is more career focused and offers certificates, diplomas, undergraduate, and PG degrees. The comprehensive university is a combination of both types of institutions (HET, 2014).

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The UoT emerged from the technikon in the changing landscape of the country. Du Pré (CHE 2006:3) suggested that there was a need to attract the “diversity of the population”, especially by opening possibilities of access to students who were not exposed to traditional universities. The guiding principle was to ensure that higher education (HE) was “varied and diverse but also contributed meaningfully to a greater technology transfer and international competitiveness”, with emphasis on student-centeredness and concomitant changes in processes in the faculty, teaching and learning and research (CHE 2006:3).

The novel concept of a UoT resulted from the culmination of ten years of discussions between the Committee of Technikon Principals, the affected institutions and the Department of Education, with a view to creating an institution with a “new vision” with three focus areas, namely: “teaching and learning, research and community engagement” (CHE:2006:ii). The CHE (2006:7) report on UoTs stated that “the main focus of the UoT is to create a learning organisation through engagement with business and industry”, with the effect of encouraging a closer relationship between industry and academia. The focus of the UoT is distinguished from the traditional university in that UoTs generate multidisciplinary applied research for commercialisation or to uplift communities (Scott in CHE, 2006) specifically focusing on “making knowledge useful” (du Preez, 2004 in Mentz, Kotze and van der Merwe, 2008:29).

Students entering postgraduate studies at UoTs are generally in full-time employment and as such are typically funded by their employers. Consequently, they find it very difficult to balance their occupational and their academic workloads, tend to feel isolated especially when the “academic programmes are inflexible”, and need support and understanding from their supervisors (Lessing, Lessing and Mackinnon, 2004 in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:209).

UNDERSTANDING THE DOCTORAL TERRAIN

The National Development Plan (NDP), (NPC, 2011) seeks to increase the number of PhD graduates in the country in the hope of providing a higher level of available skills and research to promote and sustain the economy. It therefore includes in its strategic framework, amongst others, two objectives: to increase the percentage of staff holding PhD qualifications in the HE sector from 34% to 75%, and to graduate 5 000 doctorates per year by 2030 (NDP, 2011). Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey (2015) in Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015:76-77) argue that there is a “relationship between doctoral studies and research for the development of Africa” and they therefore propose the need for “developing doctoral education in Africa”. It is against

this backdrop, and particularly in the attempt to accelerate numbers of graduates (CHE, 2009a), that research at postgraduate (PG) levels is set, encouraged and driven in the South African HE milieu.

It is reported that there was a decrease in the doctoral graduate rates from 25% in 2000 to 21% in 2005 (CHE, 2009b). Drawing on the ASSAf Report (2010:21, 68) the possible reasons for the decline in graduate rates arose from financial limitations; the lack of preparedness for academic study of students entering HE; the “pile up” effect of students in the system who were taking longer than prescribed to complete their degrees; inadequate supervisory experience and government protocols. Furthermore, and of concern, there is agreement from the science community that there are insufficient high-quality PhD graduates produced in relation to the requirements to uplift the country and that more than half of the doctoral graduates are employed in HE (ASSAf Report 2010:15,91).

Some of the factors cited for the challenges surrounding the adequate preparation of PhD graduates are: unsatisfactory student-supervisor relationships, employers’ expectations of doctoral graduates, poor exposure of graduates to international expertise and discourses, “lack of methodological competence” and lack of relevance of studies (ASSAf Report (2010:21, 68). Teferra (2014) in Samuel (2015:2) reports that executives at the Organisation of African Unity acknowledged the “poor infrastructure, high teaching loads, inadequately resourced libraries and poor academic remuneration” as possible reasons for the “under productivity” in the HE education context.

In 2007 there were twenty-six doctoral graduates per million of the total population of South Africa. The top nine universities were responsible for 83% of the doctoral graduates, of which 80% were from traditional universities (ASSAf, 2010). To improve the universities’ contribution to meeting the overall doctoral targets, management at these institutions have allocated various resources and incentives to attract and encourage PG students. Some examples of this are waivers in registration fees, appointment of research fellows and scholarships (CHE, 2009a).

In 2009, the volume of postgraduate students was reported to have doubled in the last 15 years (CHE, 2009b) while, in contrast, the number of permanent academics increased by 40%. In 2005 the average supervisor-to-student ratio for masters and doctorates was one-to-seven. Of the permanent staff 31% had doctoral degrees and 31% had master’s degrees.

The National Development Plan (2012) asserts that student performance and success will improve if the number of academics holding doctorates increases. It also

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expects that the quality of supervision will improve. Recognising that UoTs have not had a strong research history and have a very low proportion of staff with doctorates (Cloete et al. 2015) in Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015:79), the shifting nature of the UoT as an institution has brought with it changes in demands on academic staff, including the need to acquire skills in postgraduate supervision.

MY EARLY SUPERVISORY EXPERIENCES

I hold an undergraduate qualification in Chemistry and a masters and doctoral qualification in the discipline of Quality. At the time of writing, I have twelve years of experience in academia, eight years of which included a more than twenty-hour-per-week teaching workload, alongside supervision of PG students and research.

Quality is a discipline that encompasses Quality Management and Quality Engineering, and is adopted by both manufacturing and service-type organisations in an attempt to optimise and improve their processes and practices to sustainably meet customer requirements (Sower, 2009). The discipline emerged in the United States of America in the 1920s and progressed to Japan in the 1950s, where it evolved to its current popularity (Foster, 2007). Quality is typically achieved by the adoption of tools such as Total Quality Management, Lean Production, Six Sigma, and compliance with standards such as ISO 9001:2015, Good Manufacturing and Good Laboratory Practices (Foster, 2007; Sower, 2009). Modern-day Quality is adopted in all spheres of business, ranging along the value chain of fast-moving consumable goods, education, banking, motor, hospitality, applied sciences, construction, health and safety, and so on.

In aligning the theory of the Quality programme to practice and to uplift business, the impetus of HE was to introduce programmes designed to create a Quality Practitioner with a firm foundation and skills in the principles of quality engineering and quality management. At tertiary level these programmes are typically offered at UoTs, with offerings commencing at B. Tech to M. Tech and D. Tech levels. The minimum qualification to join the B. Tech Quality programme to specialise in this field is the successful completion of a diploma (in any other discipline). In contrast, the B. Tech Quality programme does not function as a stand-alone, as do other disciplines such as the National Diploma Chemistry and the National Diploma Engineering, which have a progression from undergraduate to specialisation in the same field.

By implication, given that the students' first encounter with Quality is at the B. Tech level, problems arise as students enter this discipline without having incrementally specialised in the field from the undergraduate level. Further complications arise

with students who enter the programme without having the necessary prerequisite working experience. This has very serious implications for establishing contextual and conceptual frameworks for their research, which in other programmes is recognisably structured. In this respect Sower (2009) has emphasised that students experienced difficulties in grasping Quality principles when they lacked exposure to industrial practices.

Generally, most of students on the B. Tech, M. Tech and D. Tech Quality programmes are in full-time employment and therefore engage in part-time studies. With respect to such students, Samuel (2015:11) recommends that consideration be given to training HE supervisors on doctoral programmes where the “mode of education” is changed from the “traditional form to engage the new student”.

In line with the Kagisano Report (CHE, 2006) and the move to accept students from more diverse backgrounds for doctoral training, UoTs experienced an influx of students seeking masters and doctoral qualifications. Due to the broad acceptance criteria of the Quality programmes, the masters and doctoral levels attracted a large number of potential students from varying disciplines – a situation that was embraced by the department in which I worked. This resulted in a situation reflecting the additional complexities of supervision, already identified by the CHE, arising from the dynamics of postgraduate studies having been changed by “massification”, the variety of competencies in the student cohort, the increase in the number of international students, changed student demographics, and mergers of institutions (CHE, 2009a).

The influx of students applying for postgraduate study brought with it issues that were new and unique to the UoT context, particularly in the light of a staff population with limited doctoral qualifications, and without the knowledge or experience to supervise or cope with the PG student (Grossman and Crowther, 2015). McKenna and Powell (2009:4) cite Kraak (2006) to highlight that “the UOTs were unable to attract the right calibre of student nor staff to conduct PG studies”, which was an “impediment for technology” (Ogude, Netswara and Mavundla (2001), cited in McKenna and Powell, 2009:4).

By implication this raised two issues in the department I was working in. The first was that, for many years, I was the only member of staff with a doctoral qualification and the second was that I had to supervise students across disciplines. Cross-disciplinary research, intended to “maximise innovation for socio-economic benefit” (Grossman and Crowther: 2015:1), was encouraged by my organisation. I had to supervise a large number of students (greater than twenty) when the recommended optimum staff-to-student ratio is said to be less than six-to-one (Donald et al. (1995) in

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Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail 2011:208). I was not given the opportunity to choose the number of students nor the disciplines in which I supervised.

Students were primarily accepted onto the programmes in the department if they met the minimum entrance requirements and displayed an interest in PG studies. The selection and admission of students was under the control of the Head of Department or other members of Management. As a consequence, there was a very multidisciplinary cohort of students on the PG graduate programmes in the department and, in many instances, I had to supervise outside of my own area of expertise.

I recognise the need for multidisciplinary research. Samuel (2015:9) points to the notion of doctoral studies encompassing a “multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary focus that concerns personal, cultural, national and continental concerns”. In this light he cites Jansen (2011) that there should be a “refocus of the worthwhileness of studies”. It is not, therefore, my intention to discourage supervisors from working with this approach, but rather to caution and encourage supervisors to strategise and coordinate their students’ research topics (Mutula, 2009). This needs to be done carefully so that the research topics can better serve the diversity of student interests, maximise resources, be fruitful to the student and supervisor, and ultimately produce the intermediate skills to uplift the economy (Kraak (2006) in McKenna and Powell, 2009) and the wider community. With clear consequences, I had not considered this in my early days of supervision.

AN ACCOUNT OF MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As a new supervisor, I was fortunate to attend a number of workshops and courses to obtain an overview of the different perspectives of supervision. This helped me to establish my own sense of supervision. Fataar (2012:102) advocates that expertise in research will provide the supervisor with the ability to create a climate or environment for success in supervision.

As UoT supervisors of PG research we were encouraged to supervise across disciplines and it was therefore common practice to do so. This was consistent with the various definitions of technology, where its essence rests in its ability to apply knowledge to industry (Scott in CHE, 2006:50-55) and to aid “the economy of the country” (Kraak, 2006:4 in McKenna and Powell, 2009). In this context I have graduated eighteen masters and four doctoral students at the time of writing, which roughly equates to three graduates per year since 2009. In spite of meeting all the criteria to be assessed in accordance with the Academic Staff Promotions Policy for a position as an Associate Professor, and having a notable graduate track

record from which I published a number of manuscripts in accredited journals, this multidisciplinary approach and diversity of students' topics worked against me when I applied for academic promotion. I believed that my student accomplishments and publications were indicative that I had developed an "effective supervisory system" (Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:207). However, I was repeatedly assessed as not being worthy of promotion because my credentials lacked a specific research focus area, notwithstanding the dynamics of the B. Tech Quality programme and its feeder programmes, which forced me to supervise and publish in a multidisciplinary area.

As the subsequent discussions unfold I will sketch how this rejection later positively shaped my career as a supervisor. The next section elucidates experiences of the supervisors from the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course and the survey of the cohort of supervisors from my UoT.

SURVEY OF SUPERVISORS

This section considers the experiences of eight supervisors who were delegates on the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course and a survey of five supervisors from a selected UoT.

Of the eight delegates on the SPS course, six had doctoral degrees and two had master's degrees. Three of the eight had graduated students at postgraduate levels. Their disciplinary expertise extended from Information Technology, Business Administration, Library Science, Consumer Science, Hospitality, and Microbiology to Legal Sciences. The diversity of discussions during the postgraduate course provided the qualitative data for this analysis. I have considered only discussions relating to participants' sense of supervision of PG studies.

A questionnaire was used in the survey of the supervisors from the UoT and was designed to be both qualitative and quantitative. The questionnaire consisted of nine closed-ended and two open-ended questions, seeking information on years of experience in supervision, number of students being supervised, teaching workloads and focus area of supervision. The questionnaires were emailed to twenty supervisors, of which five responded. All five participants in the survey had doctoral degrees and had graduated students. Their disciplinary expertise covered the fields of Public Relations, Economics, Chemical Engineering, Chemistry and Marketing.

The general feedback from all the participants on the SPS course and in the survey was that, due to a shortage of qualified supervisors, they were obliged to supervise more and more students in spite of increased workloads in other areas, such as

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teaching at undergraduate levels. One participant on the course was supervising thirty masters and three doctoral students concurrently.

In contrast to the participants on the course, the participants in the survey reported that, for the period 2015, they supervised fewer than seven students each and had a lecture load of less than ten periods per week. The participants in the survey found this to be a comfortable balance between the undergraduate teaching and learning and PG supervision as is supported later in the chapter. Only one of the six participants in the survey supervised students outside their area of expertise. Typically, these supervisors had the freedom to select from a pool of students those that they wished to supervise.

Four of the participants from the course mentioned that, due to poor capacity at their university, they were compelled to work outside their specific focus area or area of expertise. One participant on the course advised that she had “no choice of the student or discipline” in which she supervised and was assigned students by the faculty and frequently supervised outside her discipline as there was no other suitably qualified supervisor in her department. To overcome this “gap” in knowledge she worked with a colleague to support what she termed as “her shortcomings”. This perspective is opposed by a participant in the survey who reported being “excited” to work outside their field as it “challenged” them to “learn new things”.

A complexity around supervision of employer-funded students is that often the employer prescribes a research topic that is designed to solve a work-related problem. Such a practice has a noticeable impact on the supervisor in terms of expertise, scope of investigation, confidentiality, publications and operating in an established research focus area. A participant on the course admitted to finding this practice made her feel very apprehensive because her students arrived with designated topics usually from the manufacturing sector, whereas her expertise was in the service sector. She reported that this made her “very anxious” because she found it very difficult to find the alignment between the two sectors.

IMPLICATIONS OF SUPERVISOR SURVEY RESULTS

In Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011:211), Connell (1995) refers to supervision as the “most advanced form of teaching” in which supervisors should engage “in critical conversations” (Knowells, 1999) and establish “mentorships” (Taylor, 1995), and where success relies on the capabilities of the student and the supervisor (Radeymer, 1994; Smith et al, 1993; Hockey, 1989).

The results of the mini-survey of supervisor experiences of PG supervision suggest two main areas of concern. The first is the large numbers of students who were being allocated for supervision and, for some, the effects this potentially had on the quality of supervision that they were able to provide. The second concern was the challenges of cross-disciplinary or out-of-area-of-expertise supervision.

Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2013:290) cite CHE's (2010) observation that "the freedom to teach in preferred areas of expertise has been eroded", particularly due to the additional managerial demands recently placed on academics. Supervision outside the research expertise, and particularly when different from the area of the student, creates many difficulties during the course of the study (Donald et. al (1995), in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:208).

Ives and Rowley (2007:536, 546) focus on Holdaway et al. (1995) who assert that supervisors must be active supervisors and researchers with expertise in the students' area of study. Fischer and Larsson (2000) and Phillips and Pugh (2000) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011) concur that students typically prefer supervisors who have proven research track records and actively contribute to enhancing the discipline.

Ives and Rowley (2007: 536) cite Donald et al. (1995) that the supervisors' knowledge of the research area was one of the main factors used by students when choosing a supervisor. This is also consistent with the ASSAf Report (2010) which stated that half of the students choose a PhD or institution based on its research focus area.

Ives and Rowley (2007:546) report that when the supervisor "was not sufficiently close to the subject area", he/she was unable to advise students adequately and that he/she "can go off on a tangent". This brings into consideration whether supervision outside the field of expertise reaches its full potential, firstly, by providing applied research to serve industries (Kraak (2006) in McKenna and Powell, 2009) and, secondly, the supervisors' personal mastery and progress towards publications and possible promotion (Ntshoe and de Villiers (2008) in Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2013).

The United Kingdom Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in HE (CoPAAQS) (QAAHE, 2004:14) alludes to the importance of supervisory expertise with the relevant skills to nurture and develop the professional discipline-specific skills of the student, and to "support, encourage and monitor students effectively". Mitchell and Carroll (2007:221) assert that supervisors "may not be able to recognise unattributed borrowing should the student's research stray outside their expertise". These observations also lend themselves to considerations about the quality and the timely completion of the dissertation and thesis. Ives and

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Rowley (2007) found that students who were satisfied with their supervision and completed their thesis timeously were most likely assigned to supervisors with related expertise in their area of research.

Bak (2012) in Fataar (2012:114) notes that supervisors must also “induct students into an academic community”. Amundsen and McAlpine (2009:336) found the supervisory role as being twofold, one being to complete the thesis on time and the other being for the student to “develop and belong” to a community. In Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011:208), Lin and Cranton (2005) support the development of the student’s identity while Lessing and Schulze (2002) encourage a “network of peers and expert colleagues” to “develop social and academic skills” to make “research an interactive process” (Phillips and Pugh (2000).

Clearly, in the light of the literature on effective supervision as it relates to disciplinary coincidence between supervisor and student and the supervision workloads, the supervisor survey responses suggest that there are potential areas of concern for postgraduate research outcomes in HE in South Africa. In this respect, it is noted that the United Kingdom CoPAAQS (QAAHE, 2004:14) cautions that institutions should maintain the quality of supervision by not overburdening supervisors with additional responsibilities in teaching, research and administration and posits that institutions should provide “developmental programmes” for supervisors to promote academic competence in supervision.

Success in academia according to McMohan (2001) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011:210), arises from “research skills and not teaching abilities” – leading to caution against allocating too much time to teaching courses and supervising students simultaneously. ASSAf (2010) cautions that graduate study completion targets cannot be achieved by increasing the number of students enrolled alone. Samuel (2015) suggests that the projected target numbers for postgraduates can be achieved with the introduction of suitable education programmes. Granted, from the foregoing discourses, there is a tapestry of dialogues required to perfect the balance in supervisory workloads, supervisors’ skills in research and their discipline-specific knowledge. Moreover, and significantly, education programmes should be multifaceted to accommodate the changing profile of the student, consider their academic literacy, and be career sensitive to serve societal needs and improve the economy of the country (Samuel, 2015:15).

CHOOSING A RESEARCH FOCUS AREA.

I firmly believed that I wanted to develop my career in postgraduate supervision and, drawing on Mitchell and Carroll (2007:219), that the value of doctoral studies is

to produce an “original and significant contribution” to the “body of knowledge”. I therefore decided to seek a suitable research focus area that would serve business and industry (in line with the required focus of UoTs). I was very fortunate to be given the opportunity by the Dean of Faculty and Head of Department to pursue this. I approached the Team Leader of an established research focus area in Nanotechnology to join his research group. As a result, in 2013 I initiated a research focus area in investigating Quality practices in engineered nano-materials and, with five B. Tech, one M. Tech and two D. Tech students, joined my colleague’s research group. At the end of that year five B. Tech students, all the postgraduate students and myself presented posters and papers at an international conference. This was the first time that B. Tech students from the department participated in international conferences.

I formalised the research focus area in 2014 and encouraged potential students to confine their investigations to a list of topics in this area. Although this list was in the discipline of Nanotechnology, the focus of each study within it had a multidisciplinary approach that encompassed food science, occupational health and safety, water security, materials science and environmental management. Moreover, the suggested topics embraced two phases in the development of research at my UoT – namely, educating for the needs of industry and rediscovering technology (Winberg (2005) in Mentz, Kotze and van der Merwe, 2008:29).

Importantly, the diversity of students’ backgrounds was accommodated within the identified focus areas. I paid particular attention not to duplicate research that was already done and this facilitated collaboration between the Faculty of Engineering (full-time Mechanical Engineering students) and Faculty of Management Sciences (part-time Quality students), where we were able to align our research to national and international needs (Mentz, Kotze and van der Merwe, 2008:29).

Arising out of the 2014 cohort, five B. Tech students progressed into the M. Tech programme in 2015. Their research designs evolved into unique opportunities and, at the time of writing, we are working on ground-breaking research in the fields of nanomedicine (drug delivery), occupational health and safety (protective clothing), environmental management (disposal of engineered nanomaterials (ENMs)), agriculture (food security) and quality (integration and compliance of management systems). These topic areas are very much aligned with the views of Musiige and Maassen (2015) in Cloete Maassen and Bailey (2015:109) who moot the much needed focus for research in the following sectors: health care, education, industrial production and innovation for economic growth.

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We also established a low-level animal testing facility which stimulated new thinking about research that we had never previously considered. For example, in the past we would investigate a research problem, suggest how it should be addressed, adopted, implemented and maintained from a theoretical perspective and, in the process, neglected to understand its complexities in application and practice. This has since changed as all our research designs in this specific focus area include an experimental component which investigates the application of the research findings.

The IAU-ACUP (2012) assertion that the African culture ... “does not know how to evaluate the competencies of PhD holders nor the relevance of what they can contribute to society” remains very close to my thoughts, both when selecting topics for research that are deemed useful and when developing research designs (Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey (2015) in Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015:77).

ADVANTAGES OF SUPERVISING IN AN ESTABLISHED RESEARCH FOCUS AREA

Since developing my research and supervision practices within an established research focus area, I have experienced a number of benefits. As the following discussion reveals, these include the possibilities for the development of a broader vision within research, increased opportunities for access to funding and for network building, and expanded research opportunities through collaborative relationships. Of critical importance was the opportunity to develop strategies for effective supervision in the UoT context of postdoctoral education.

Working with a research team and under the guidance of an established researcher encouraged me to move out of my comfort zone, and to look at research from a larger and unconventional perspective in terms of the types of topics selected (expertise in research area), the research stance adopted and the experimental designs developed (supervisory role) (Lessing and Schulze (2002) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:210).

In six months I had four opportunities to apply for external funding which I had not previously had when I worked outside this research focus area. Furthermore, we were able to secure funding for the commercialisation of a product arising out of a research project in collaboration with an industry partner and an international university partner. The experimental work for this project is, at the time of writing, at advanced stages with three masters students on the project. This aligns with the advice of Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey (2015) in Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015:79), who purport that the NDP plan suggests that supervisory capacity can be improved through arrangements where research-intensive universities assist “teaching and

learning universities”, “foster partners with industry and commerce” and “introduce partnership exchanges with international universities”.

It was gratifying when, at a recent international conference in India, our Team Leader was invited to publish a book of our research findings on the basis of his presentation of our research projects. The publishers accentuated the novelty, uniqueness and limited existing knowledge available in this research area. This invitation gave us the confidence that our efforts, competence as supervisors, reflections on our practices and knowledge (Brown and Atkins (1998), in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:210) were channelled into a fitting milieu and encouraged us to fervently grow the research group.

Arising out of the establishment of a research focus area we now hold an international conference biennially, host a number of new and collaborating international researchers and conduct annual research students’ writers’ retreats in conjunction with collaborating partners. The first international conference was held in 2013. Networking during the conference allowed us the opportunity to establish relationships with a number of research-intensive universities, scientific regulatory bodies, industry and international university partners. We hosted the second international conference in 2015, where we have added four new conference themes that are directly related to my specific research focus area. The relationships established following the first conference allowed us to invite researchers from all these universities to peer-review our conference abstracts and produce nationally accredited proceedings. The reviewers’ feedback on the additional themes in the conference has been very positive and supportive.

We have introduced a number of supervision strategies since 2013. We found that in spite of the students attending an orientation research workshop they still lacked the knowledge that encompassed doctoral studies and processes (Golde and Dore (2001) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:2010). Consequently, writers’ retreats were introduced where supervisors were readily available to consult with the students. Students progressed with their review papers for publishing purposes and others worked on the chapters for their dissertations or thesis (Donald et al. (1995) and Holdaway, (1991) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:209). We were very fortunate that this space provided us the opportunity to be “critical friends/readers” (Hockey, 1996; Sheehan, 1994) for each student and was viewed positively by the students who actually requested more of these writers’ sessions. Due to limited funds we subsequently introduced the writers’ sessions monthly, where we worked intensely on one day over in the weekend rather the entire weekend. This proved to be invaluable for both the supervisor and the student in that the supervisor was able

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to ensure that there was open, clear communication where work progressed and the student was able to engage with the supervisor and solve a number of queries timeously (Shannon (1995) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:210).

Another form of our supervision strategy was to introduce weekly presentations as a basis to initiate conversations between student researchers and to develop “expert colleagues” as an additional support structure to the supervisor. Every week two students from the group present their work and their latest findings. We find that this stimulates robust discussions and innovations (Mutula, 2009:1) and creativity in areas such as alternate experiments, equipment and forms for presenting data. It also gave the students insight into the other possible topics within the focus area (Lovitts (2005) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:208). We also find that students build their own networks and would come across literature applicable to other students in the group and forward the readings to them. Thus, in many ways, working in a group gave all the students a better understanding of the contribution of their work in nanotechnology from a broader perspective and probably inducted them into an identity of a community of practice (Lin and Cranton (2005) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:208). Some support for this conclusion is evident from the findings of the PG student survey presented later in the chapter.

Publication of student work is also an area that I have been able to supervise more effectively. In the past I was accustomed to supervising a student’s study to completion and then publishing a paper collaboratively with the student post-submission of the dissertations/thesis. In some instances, I would lose the student to the stresses of their employ and life itself and we would fail to publish a paper from their study. With regard to employer-funded students, in many instances I was unable to publish their findings due to confidentiality clauses prescribed by their employers. To overcome restrictions on publishing and in acknowledging the infamous pressure to ‘publish or perish’, I sought permission from the employers to publish findings prior to accepting students onto the programme. This grew favourably and allowed me to initiate my path of publishing in journals and thus paved the path to my research and supervision journey.

Now the practice adopted in the group is that students are encouraged to publish papers simultaneously as they are studying and I adopted this practice with my cohort. In six months we have students who have completed the first chapters of their dissertations, have engaged in some of their experimental work and have draft papers for publishing, while others are preparing a second paper for publishing (Hockey (1996) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:208).

Another favourable practice in the research group was the payment of a monthly stipend to full-time engineering students during their tenure. I found that it was a feasible practice for the following reasons: it encouraged students to register as full-time students, they were working on their research daily, they were in contact with the supervisor on a daily basis and, most importantly, they could focus on their studies without the pressure of employers or other financial constraints. On the other hand, as attractive as this may sound, there are down sides to the arrangement. Firstly, the supervisor spends a considerable amount of time seeking funding and has to perpetually write proposals to funding agencies to remunerate students. Secondly, I have seen a few students who prolonged their studies, possibly in an attempt to be “employed”. To circumvent this in the future we have decided to sign contracts with new students prescribing time frames for the duration of their studies.

A big positive of the various developments around supervision is that M. Tech students who are about to submit their dissertations for examinations are very keen to remain in the research focus group to pursue doctoral studies. This resonates with Naledi Pandor’s (2014) budget speech in Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey (2015) in Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015:79) which asserts provisions should be made to support PG supervisors and that suitable conditions should be created to keep existing students in the university to embark on doctoral studies. This is a favourable indication of the success of our supervision stance.

A SURVEY OF PG STUDENTS STUDYING IN THE RESEARCH GROUP

In Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011:208), Lin and Cranton (2005) recognise the development of the graduate from a “scholarship student to a responsible scholar”, while Lovitts (2005) admits that this is a “critical transition”. This transition is evident in the feedback of the students who were surveyed.

A questionnaire was emailed to all the students in the research group. Both full-time (ten) and part-time students (five) were asked five open-ended questions. Their feedback was anonymous. I consolidated the feedback received from seven students. The students were not coerced in any way to answer the questionnaire. All the students are adult, mature students and, based on the replicability of responses, it is reasonable to consider their responses as being reflective of their experiences.

The first question was: ‘What’s your impression of working in a research focus area?’ The general feedback was that it was a ‘great’ way to ‘fast track’ their work and that it contributed holistically to a discipline as it ‘closed the gaps’ in knowledge. They considered that the knowledge and guidance received from research colleagues motivated them and provided them with the confidence to better understand their

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research. They also reported that working in a group allowed them the opportunity to work with a multidisciplinary team that helped to enrich their research.

The second question was: 'Do you think you would have a similar experience if you did not work in a research focus area?' Their responses were 'No', the consensus being that they would not be able to make a difference to the discipline at the same rate as they were able to when working in a group; that the research would be limited (not multidisciplinary); that other research students are very busy with little time to spare for discussions; that working in the group facilitates daily interactions; and that weekly students' presentations encourage new and relevant discourses.

The third question asked students to: 'Comment on the knowledge, expertise and support from your supervisor.' The responses were typically that even though 'we' researched in a novel area, great effort was put in by supervisors who ensured that they read extensively to 'stay ahead' of the students and to keep the research at 'its cutting edge'. Guidance, support and advice were readily available and supervisors' knowledge made the journey bearable, exciting, fantastic and rewarding.

The fourth question asked students to: 'Comment on the support from your research colleagues.' The responses included: 'even though our topics were not the same students assisted each other, interaction was engaging and it helped to shape the research approach from many angles'; and 'it made the work less tedious, the support was motivational'. I found the following comment particularly interesting: 'it is encouraging to see that other students share the same experiences'. This student did not elaborate further but it could be inferred that students are able to identify with each other's experiences.

The final question was: 'Would you get the same support from student colleagues not working in a research focus area?' Again, the responses amounted to 'No' – for example: 'working in a group forces us to interact with each other daily otherwise we would not know who to ask'.

Khosravi and Ahmad (2014:2) hold the view that the "greatest challenge" for universities is that students and supervisors do not share their ideas, experiences and knowledge with each other. From the feedback above, it is evident that by working in a group the students did not feel isolated as they always had "expert colleagues" to unpack and deliberate on their queries and they engaged in discussions around their work (critical thinking) (Lin and Cranton (2005) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2009). It was also sobering for them to see that other students encountered the same difficulties as they did and, lastly, that the supervisors' expertise in the discipline provided them with the necessary confidence in their research. My interpretation of

the results of the student survey is that these PG students were very comfortable, not only in working in a 'community' but also within the 'identity' of a discipline.

ONGOING CHALLENGES OF SUPERVISION IN A RESEARCH FOCUS AREA

I have only been able to attract part-time students at this stage. It is hoped that funding can be accessed so that I can offer students a reasonable stipend. This would encourage more full-time students into the group and existing students to progress to higher levels of study.

Some of the benefits that are available to my students in the context of supervision in an established research focus group are limited to certain categories of students. Thus, at the time of writing, the weekly presentations of research can only be attended by full-time students in the group while part-time students attend less frequently. Discussions are in progress about ways to introduce this to the part-time students. Equally, I am unable to offer the research stipend to Quality M. Tech students as they are all employed full time, which contravenes the contract of funders. My students also typically have been working in industry for a number of years before they embark on PG studies so they are relatively advanced in their designations and we are therefore unable to match the remuneration packages of industry with our stipends. It might be worthy to advertise full-time student opportunities to 'newly qualified students' to attract them into the Quality programmes.

It is not easy to work in a research group. It is extremely pressurising and sometimes very difficult to manage the quantity of marking submitted whilst, at the same time, remaining sensitive to varying students' personalities and their needs. For example, I can never plan a day; there are always challenges and queries from students that need immediate action. These have to be carefully programmed and, even then, do not necessarily work to schedules. This has overwhelmed me on a number of occasions.

My greatest challenge lies in the acceptance of PG proposals at faculty level. The Quality programme is housed in the Faculty of Management Sciences, even though the 'feeder' programmes are from the Faculty of Applied Sciences. Hence the discipline of Quality is reviewed by academics with commerce and management backgrounds, with their expertise limited to compliance to standards and quality control. Consequently, PG proposals are marked from this perspective and investigations outside this expertise are deemed inconsistent with the discipline. Quality has very rich contributions to both Quality Management and Quality Engineering and it makes sense that only Quality practitioners are able to identify with this. Unfortunately, I am the only person with discipline-specific expertise on the

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Faculty Committee which evaluates and approves PG proposals. Feedback from the reviewers is very traumatic, painful, frustrating, inconsistent, inaccurate, and time consuming, for both the student and myself. My next step would be to encourage that the suitability and focus of the PG proposal be matched accordingly with reviewers who have experience in the Quality discipline.

Due to the uniqueness of our studies, we have experienced many challenges in acquiring ethical clearance for our studies, especially those related to animal protocols. After six months of engagement with the relevant institutional committee we are nowhere near a resolution on a way forward with our proposals.

A further challenge is in the appointment of a post-doctoral fellow (PDF). I believe that this would expedite the research initiatives and facilitate publications within the focus area. However, due to the novelty of the discipline and the remuneration package allocated to PDFs, I am unable to attract a suitable candidate.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter suggested that there needs to be a shift in supervisory practice to cater for a changing student body and research possibilities in the UoT. It showed that the effective supervision of increased volumes of PGs is achievable with the introduction of suitable academic initiatives. It presented the benefits of supervising and conducting research in a specific focus area and how this can be achieved from a multidisciplinary perspective. The chapter emphasised the satisfaction of supervisors and research students when they contributed to the body of knowledge in their wider discipline.

From a personal perspective I felt depleted, both mentally and physically, when I worked outside a research focus area. The research topics had become stale and routine, and were not making a difference or change in the discipline to benefit the greater community. I also found that the students got bored with their topics and lost momentum and motivation during their study. As the account presented in this chapter suggests, I have found it easier and more satisfying to work in a specific research focus area for the following reasons: it allowed me an opportunity to manage and supervise multiple students in groups; to encourage the sharing and exchange of literature reviews with and among students (thus saving them time); students supported each other in challenging times both in a personal and professional capacity and, most importantly, I noticed the camaraderie between them, which I think is very important to keep the motivation and momentum to take the study to completion (Hockey (1996) in Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail, 2011:208).

In the face of the ageing supervisor (Grossman and Crowther, 2015) and changing economies, the UoTs have drifted from issues around identity from the past to “fitness of purpose and the quality of teaching and learning” (Dell, 2014) to ensure that “knowledge is useful” (Mentz, Kotze and van der Merwe, 2008). The CHE (2006:7) declares that “[t]he UOT serves as a learning laboratory for experimenting with new approaches and practices for the design and delivery of learning and research initiatives”. As a result of working in a team context in a specific research focus area I feel reinvigorated and passionate about research. I have found a sense of worth in my contribution to the discipline and I believe that I am indeed making a difference to society with the work that my students and I are undertaking in my research focus area.

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10

DEVELOPING A SUPERVISION IDENTITY IN VISUAL STUDIES

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I focus on the challenges of developing my identity as a novice supervisor. In the process I acknowledge the difficulties of being located within a visual discipline, and one which is characterised as a field not traditionally associated with what is perceived by many academics to be rigorous, serious research. This latter perception is largely explained by the fact that it is only recently that practice-based research, which involves varying degrees of subjective interpretation and self-expression, has emerged as a recognised research methodology. A further factor is that universities of technology – within which much of my practice has been located – have only recently included a research mandate in their institutional missions (NPC, 2012).

The context for my own development of an identity as a novice supervisor includes current challenges with regard to postgraduate study in the South African context; the characteristics and research community of the university where I am based at the time of writing, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU); the specific research community in which I supervise; and the power relations in supervision. Once these aspects of the context for supervision have been established, I reflect on my own supervisory practice in order to add insight into practices of supervision – in my case within Visual Studies.

NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

South Africa has a low number of doctoral graduates, and is under pressure both to increase the number of graduates and to improve the throughput rate of students

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enrolling. Despite efforts to improve the numbers of doctoral graduates, a report released by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2012 indicates that South Africa only produced 26 doctorates per million of the country's total population (DHET 2012:42).

Of further concern is the fact that only approximately 39% of higher education sector staff in South Africa have PhDs (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015:113). According to Trotter et al. (2014:48), "the lack of endogenous PhD development is therefore a negative factor in intensifying research, especially the development of local epistemologies". In addition, the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) (2010:27) claims that their research "shows that there is high correlation between staff with doctorates, on the one hand, and research output and the training of PhD students, on the other".

South Africa has three types of universities under which eleven are classified as 'universities' (defined as such in the apartheid era); six as 'universities of technology' (formerly known as technikons or technical universities) and six which are defined as 'comprehensive universities' (the result of a merger between universities and technikons) (Bailey, Cloete and Pillay, 2012). It is in this latter context that my identity as supervisor has emerged. The National Planning Commission (NPC) (2012:317) makes it clear that South Africa's twenty-three universities are:

[s]truggling to keep pace with the needs of the country. South African universities are mid-level performers in terms of knowledge production, with low participation, high attrition rates and insufficient capacity to produce the required levels of skills. They are still characterized by historical inequities and distortions. The university sector is under considerable strain. Enrolments have almost doubled in 18 years yet the funding has not kept up, resulting in slow growth in the number of university lecturers, inadequate student accommodation, creaking university infrastructure and equipment shortages.

In light of this assessment, NPC is of the opinion that it is critical for universities to "develop capacity to provide quality undergraduate teaching" and calls for improving 'the qualifications of higher education academic staff' – from the current 34% with doctorates "to over 75% by 2030" (NPC, 2012:318, 319).

In 'Universities and Economic Development in Africa Case Study: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University', Bailey, et al. (2012:118) contend that "the foundation of the university's business is its academic core – that is, its teaching via academic degree programmes, its research output, and the production of doctorates". The publication further indicates that doctoral graduates at NMMU increased from 27 in 2001 to 35 in 2007, This is a very modest increase that did not reflect the considerable

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increase in doctoral enrolments, from 175 to 327 between 2001 and 2007 (Bailey et. al. 2012:119). In 2014 NMMU reported on graduation achievements, noting the awarding of 72 doctorates, of which 23 were awarded to NMMU staff members (NMMU 2014). These were still modest figures in the light of prior enrolment figures.

NMMU has embraced the challenge to improve the quality of postgraduate education in South Africa, and in 2010 published a document titled Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Vision 2020 Strategic Plan. This addresses issues such as the University's vision, mission, values, knowledge paradigm, educational purpose, and philosophy, as well as a desired graduate attributes profile. The following strategic goals are identified: to conduct research that contributes to local, regional, national, and global sustainability; create and support an environment that fosters research quality and productivity; develop and sustain the research capacity of staff and students; and promote a broad conceptualisation of research, scholarship and innovation (NMMU 2010:38-42).

In the current academic climate, most South African universities share NMMU's goals for research or ones that are similar. This is a constructive position to be in, as it fosters collaboration and builds relationships and learning between supervisors. I therefore currently supervise B-Tech and M-Tech students at NMMU and co-supervise D-Tech students at TUT, as we do not presently have the capacity to offer the D-Tech qualification within Applied Design at NMMU.

I believe that NMMU has risen to the challenge of increasing postgraduate research by providing developmental opportunities aimed at increasing supervision capacity, particularly for novice supervisors. Since becoming associated with the NMMU as a postdoctoral fellow, I have engaged in many such programmes and workshops, most notably the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* (SPS) programme, which has played a significant and formative role in my approach to supervision. I have also been a participant in the Phuhlisa programme, which is offered by the NMMU Research Capacity Development Centre to develop emerging researchers. As part of this programme I have been acting as a mentor to two staff members actively taking part in postgraduate research. Participation in Phuhlisa provided me with the opportunity to attend a variety of workshops, to network and exchange ideas with others in the field as well as the research and supervisory process for masters students. The major benefit of these workshops was the affirmation of my own research approach and engagement, and the development of my academic writing skills as well as the development of a sense of belonging to a community of practice.

Additionally, I have a longstanding relationship with Tshwane University of Technology and, over the past ten years, have supervised and co-supervised masters

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and doctoral students. I received a postdoctoral fellowship from TUT, with terms that provided a conducive research environment and financial support for the academic output that I engaged in. I believe this opportunity was beneficial to both parties as I believe that I played a role in helping to qualify some of their staff and students and so grow the TUT institutional research platform, while at the same time gaining valuable experience and support in my own research activities.

DISCIPLINARY CONTEXTS

I am a specialist within the field of Applied Design/Visual Communication, and the research I supervise deals mainly with visual communication, particularly within a South African context. Traditionally, the fields within Applied Design – such as Graphic Design, Textile Design, Fashion Design and Photography – have been practically and vocationally orientated and so have not emerged from a research background. They are therefore in the process of growing a research culture. One of the challenges associated with this is that there are very few suitably qualified supervisors and examiners within the field. Although this applies particularly to my discipline, it should also be noted that Dietz, Jansen and Wadee (2006:17) position the problem of a dearth of suitably qualified supervisors as a universal problem amongst South African institutions due to “the uncontrolled growth of doctoral student numbers and the corresponding lack of supervision capacity”.

On the one hand, this situation has placed me outside of my comfort zone and left me feeling uncertain and apprehensive but, on the other, it has encouraged me to engage in co-supervising in disciplines that I may not necessarily have chosen if the need had not been there. Overall, this experience has been a significant part of my growing identity. Not only has it been rewarding and resulted in improving my supervisory skills but, crucially, it has also resulted in my becoming part of a small but growing community of practice in Visual Studies and has enabled me to develop good working relationships with an increasing number of emerging supervisors.

SUPERVISION: A RANGE OF APPROACHES

Postgraduate supervision varies in terms of the approaches to supervision; the role of the supervisor and the assumed relationship between supervisor and student; and the processes considered to be constituents of supervision practice. These are all important aspects in the development of a novice supervisor’s identity – whether assumed by choice or by the imposition of contextual norms and constraints. According to Dietz, Jansen and Wadee (2006:9):

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For the better part of the previous century, South African universities followed the classic British model of supervision. A single student working with a single supervisor on an assigned or agreed-on topic over a lengthy period of time would eventually submit a doctoral thesis for examination.

Manathunga and Goozée (2007:309) give an apt description of this type of postgraduate supervision relationship. The students are assumed to be:

‘always/already’ independent researchers ... with excellent critical and creative thinking and writing skills ... If students do not have these skills at the beginning of their candidature, it is expected that they will gain them merely by observing and imitating their supervisor. This construction of supervision is heavily embedded in the traditional master/apprentice model of supervision. It is based on a transmission approach to education, where students want to be filled up with their supervisor’s knowledge ... Similarly, until recently, it was assumed that once they had experienced the process themselves, supervisors became automatically always/already effective. As a result, supervisors often repeated the master/apprentice approach to supervision they experienced as a student. Therefore, powerful assumptions about the always/already autonomous student and effective supervisor pair became self-perpetuating.

Albertyn and Bitzer (2011:880) are of the opinion that the apprenticeship approach is the style most used in South African universities. However, while the apprenticeship approach may still be apparent in Visual Studies, it is definitely no longer the norm as panels of supervisors are increasingly drawn from a variety of disciplines.

In this respect, Hay (2010:26) refers to four traditional forms of supervision, namely as a sole supervisor, as supervisor and co-supervisor, as panel supervision and as project supervision. Similarly, Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:7) classify approaches to supervision as “traditional one-to-one supervision, group supervision and the team/panel approach”. They further reflect on the role of the supervisor as providing mentoring, sponsoring, progressing the candidature and coaching, based on Pearson and Kayrooz’s (2004:104-105) five constructs of facilitative supervisory practice, namely: coaching, facilitating, mentoring, reflective practice, and sponsoring. These constructs broaden the generic understanding of the role of the supervisor. Importantly for the discussion in this chapter, Pearson and Kayrooz emphasise the fact that not all supervisors within a common field of expertise need to have a similar supervisory approach or practice, and that these differences should be embraced and be understood as a basis to empower the supervisor to find their own personal strengths and weaknesses.

Notwithstanding the possibility for different approaches, there is a strong but unspoken tradition in postgraduate supervision that intelligent undergraduate

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students are able to transform themselves into independent researchers with minimal explicit pedagogical input from their supervisors.

According to Dietz (2010:77), "Supervisory styles have to do with the personality and position of the supervisor(s), but they also have to do with the personality and position of the PhD candidate." The types of candidates listed include students preferring a personal relationship; the business-like student; and the personal-interest, interactive student. Other variables inhere in the dynamics in styles of supervision where, depending on the stage the research is at, the relationship between the student and the supervisor, or the needs of the student, the style of supervision may be different (Dietz 2010:77-81). This is perhaps something that a supervisor, in varying degrees, intuitively practises, but by understanding and implementing these differences consciously the supervisory practice will be enhanced.

Brew (2001) states that "supervision can be conceptualised as a set of skills and techniques to solve problems, promote enculturation into the research community and foster the development of the whole person". Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) are of the opinion that the supervisory process is no longer only focused on the research product, but that there are rather three aspects relevant to supervision processes: the research product, research identity formation and ontological development.

My discussion in this chapter particularly focuses on the supervisory process as identity formation. Green (2005:153) is of the opinion that "doctoral education is as much about identity formation as it is about knowledge production". I will consider this by reflecting on experiences of supervision that have contributed to my identity formation – namely of supervisors and mentors in my own research and teaching; and of aspects of supervision practice.

REFLECTING ON MY OWN SUPERVISORS AND MENTORS

Another part of developing an identity as a supervisor is to reflect critically on past supervision experiences as a student. When conducting my own postgraduate research, I was fortunate enough to have supervisors for both my masters and doctoral studies who had a very uplifting mentoring approach to supervising. This has impacted greatly on the development of my own supervisory approach. In effect, that they were both supportive but, at the same time, objective and analytical (Wilkes, 2006) and they provided me with an enabling, yet challenging, environment in which to develop.

As part of the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course we were tasked with interviewing experienced doctoral supervisors. I decided on two candidates for

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discussion, based on the positive mentoring impact they have had on my own supervisory practice and the development of my identity as supervisor. The process helped me to reflect directly on my sense of self as a supervisor, not least in that we should not be confined, in our approach to supervisory practice, by trying to replicate the way we were supervised, or any one particular ‘ideal’ (Lee, 2007).

The candidates I chose to interview were a Professor of Photographic History and Director of Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Arts, University of Brighton (UK), and a Research Professor in the Faculty of the Arts, Tshwane University of Technology. The latter was my supervisor for my doctorate and my mentor during my postdoctoral studies, and his critical but positive feedback would always stimulate insightful self-reflection. The former ran the research methodology courses at TUT, where I supervised my first masters students, and his research methodology courses impacted the way that I initially approached supervision and structured the research methodology courses that I subsequently presented.

When questioned on their particular approach to supervising, the following responses were given. One interviewee mentions three fundamental strands to his approach to supervision, namely: “To act as a sounding board and an inspirer for the candidate, to encourage the candidate to share and brainstorm, and lastly, spending time to develop the skills for writing an effective proposal”.

Munro (2014) considers his doctoral candidates as colleagues and generally does not diverge from the approach outlined above. According to Newbury (2014) the type of approach to supervision varies “depending on the project and, possibly more significant, the student’s style of working. Each supervision is different. In part I think research students should take responsibility for managing the supervisory relationship. In general, I think it is a good idea to set a pattern of having supervisory meetings around work/writing that the student submits ahead of a meeting. Where possible, I like to work as part of a supervisory team and to meet with the student together with the other supervisor (or supervisors).” [Personal communication]

Newbury (2014) adapts his approach to supervision: “If a student demonstrates a clear sense that they know what they are doing, I’m happy to sit back a bit and be responsive to the work as it develops”. Both Munro and Newbury allow the student to lead the research and are open to allowing the student to determine how the supervisory relationship progresses. These are qualities I strive to embrace in my own supervisory practice.

The following are the interviewees’ personal perceptions of their role as supervisor. According to the Professor from Brighton (2014), the doctorate “proceeds from

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the understanding that the candidate has to all intents and purposes mastered the intricacies of doing research – planning, executing and writing; thus the supervisor simply acts as a critical reader of the material to check for holes in the argument – hence the notion of guidance more than supervision.”

The Professor from Tshwane University of Technology (2014) is of the view that the supervisor’s role changes over the lifetime of a doctoral project, although essentially it involves guiding the student in shaping a viable project, directing them to relevant literature, sources, and so on, as well as acting as a critical but supportive reader of the student’s work.

The concept that features strongly in both replies is that the student assumes the role of researcher while the supervisor acts as a critical advisor. In my opinion this is the most difficult as well as liberating form of supervision; the impulse to ‘take control’ and ‘instruct’ is ever present, but it is also restrictive and disempowering, resulting in ‘conservative’ work.

When questioned on their students’ misconceptions of the role of the supervisor, both interviewees referred to instances where the student sees the supervisor as all-knowing. Students demonstrated lacking an appreciation of what is involved in a doctorate, which perhaps relates directly to a misunderstanding of what Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:7) identify as “traditional one-to-one supervision”. Both interviewees encourage their candidates to take charge in developing a working strategy for the progress of the study that suits the individual.

What is apparent from my interviews is the fact that these supervisors from diverse backgrounds within the Visual Arts discipline are not fixed in their approach to supervising, being required to work within their discipline as well as in a multidisciplinary context (Lee 2007). While there may be misconceptions in the original perceptions of the candidates as to the role of the supervisor, the interviewees encourage their students to take charge and set the tone of the research by making sure that the candidate’s responsibilities are clearly outlined.

REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES OF SUPERVISION PRACTICE

The experiences of supervision practice that I consider central to the development of my identity as a supervisor can be addressed under three themes. Firstly, differences in expertise have the potential to construct social exclusion – whether related to language proficiency or to disciplinary knowledge – and I have found learning to deal with this in my practice as a supervisor has been enlightening. Secondly, I reflect on my learning and development in relation to possible modes of supervision.

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Finally, I consider some experiences of critical learnings on the role of the supervisor and how this might be facilitated through the process of intervention.

DIFFERENCES AND LIMITATIONS

Having briefly discussed my own formative experiences as a supervisor, I now consider the possible dimensions of social exclusion that my context of supervision presents. These relate to two specific aspects of my experience – language proficiency of students and my own disciplinary expertise. Grappling with the challenges of these issues in my supervision practice is another crucial part of developing an identity as a supervisor.

As the issue of social inclusion and transformation in postgraduate education is a crucial one for South Africa, it is important for the supervisor to understand the role that they can play within the transformation process and how they can do this without jeopardising the research process by moving beyond their personal capabilities. For example, I would find it challenging to supervise a student who was not academically proficient in English. So far, I have supervised numerous students of differing cultural and language orientations who were academically proficient in English. However, the challenge of working in a language other than your mother tongue was revealed to me when I was asked to translate one of my own abstracts into Afrikaans. The nature of the terminology used in my field of expertise is such that a direct translation was not possible, and what I thought would take an hour ended up taking days, and finally required a consultation with a language expert. Reflecting on this experience, it became clear to me that for a student where language proficiency in English was likely to be a problem I would possibly need to consider a co-supervisor, or to recommend an alternative supervisor who would be better able to assist the potential student.

Although I have in the past supervised across disciplines and out of my immediate area of expertise, my capacity to supervise a larger number of students depends on how many are within my area of expertise and how many would require larger amounts of reading and engagement on my part to interact proficiently. The key is to realise the differences and limitations, and to enter the supervisory relationship understanding the critical issues that may jeopardise the whole process rather than to apply the same supervisory approach over and over.

POWER RELATIONS IN SUPERVISION

The idea that the student is 'always/already' is apparent in both the interviews with supervisors discussed above. However, recently supervisors have been encouraged

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to take a more active teaching role in the supervisory process. Out of the various possible configurations of supervision, I have acted as a sole supervisor, as a co-supervisor and have worked on a supervisory panel (of three supervisors). In general, I found the co-supervisor relationship the most comfortable form to work in, as it is useful to be able to have an alternate or confirming opinion on matters that I may not be an expert in. I firmly believe that, from early on in such an arrangement, the supervisors need to find a way of giving feedback that is not too contradictory so as to avoid unnecessary confusion. As soon as there is a power struggle between the supervisors then the whole process becomes doomed to fail.

Although I would not necessarily always choose to work on a panel of supervisors, the experience I had working within a team was a very rewarding one and I found the experience an enriching one. I was invited to co-supervise as a subject expert for a doctoral study. The panel was made up of a research methodology expert, a psychologist and myself, a visual communicator. It was an interesting panel, and the process ran relatively smoothly. From the early stages of working together we finalised a draft work schedule to determine the main responsibilities for each supervisor within the writing process. As a co-supervisor I managed to add contributions without always having to face the final decision-making that the main supervisor was tasked with. The standard was high and I did substantial work to ensure my recommendations were sound and within the broader study context. I believe that this has been a good developmental experience and introduction to supervising doctoral students.

THE EMERGING SUPERVISOR: THE ROLE OF INTERVISION

As a supervisor I am always in search of the best possible way to help the individual scholar, and I find each supervisory experience a major growth curve for myself. During the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* (run for staff members at NMMU) we learned about the process of “interview” (Dietz et al, 2006: 67), which is a facilitated discussion used for peer support and aimed at solving a particular supervisory challenge. It is usually a structured contact between colleagues to allow reflection, collaboration, professional networking, and the development of specific competencies. From this exercise the honesty and sharing of one of the participants in my group inspired me to look at one of my own negative experiences in the supervision process in order to understand the growth that took place in dealing with the issue. I therefore reflect below on one of my most challenging supervisory experiences.

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I had been mentoring a colleague who asked me to supervise her M-Tech study, which required a dissertation as well as a practical body of images as the final output for the study. In order to alleviate the possible tension between the student and myself, I decided to approach an expert (from another institution) in the methodology we had decided on for the study, to request them to act as co-supervisor. We further decided to use two practising artists, who were also academics, to advise on the practical body of work. This arrangement worked very well, and within two years the student handed in a body of work that all involved considered to have been of a high standard.

In the final stages of examination, the examiner recused herself, and I was faced with the process of re-examination and intense introspection. I felt I had failed the student and questioned my own academic capabilities. Before the second marking session took place I decided that it was not only myself who had advised on the study, but that I had relied on expert opinions and the student had worked very hard. I decided that I should trust my academic judgment and was understandably elated when the second examination yielded a distinction. Later that year the study was awarded the academic recognition of best (non-science) M-Tech submission at the institution, having been selected by an independent research panel.

Even though the experience ended on a high note and affirmed my role as a supervisor to both my student and myself, the associated learning curve was extremely steep. I learned not to take things for granted or be overconfident, and that the examination process is not always going to be simple and straightforward. I realised, therefore, that it was critical to always be prepared and to prepare my student for the unexpected. In this instance I found that my role was to lead the process, no matter what, and to follow through by trusting my own judgment, as well as to act in the best interest of my student – even when I felt powerless. Having been introduced to the process of intervention, I think that this process is a consideration for future supervisory practice that I will endeavour to establish and use.

MY IDENTITY AS AN EMERGING SUPERVISOR

All of the issues discussed above have impacted on the way in which I have tried to develop my own identity as a supervisor. Looking back to my very first encounter as a supervisor, I know that my outlook on the supervisory process has undergone tremendous change. At first I saw myself as an expert who was more than willing to impart my knowledge to my students in order to facilitate the research process within a fairly narrow perspective. I very quickly found that I had much to learn, and that, by allowing the research process to become a joint endeavour, each individual

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student was a source of experience and enrichment. Perhaps I was lucky enough to start supervising at a time when universities were expanding research capacity and I was able to grow my own knowledge base by attending developmental workshops.

My experience as a masters and doctoral student within the emerging universities of technology was rather fraught with problem-solving situations – trying to find supervisors who were qualified within my field of study, dealing with institutional process which had yet to be implemented, and working in an environment that was only just starting to embrace a research culture. Over the past decade I have seen much growth and positive development in research within the universities of technology and the comprehensive university that I have been associated with.

I am continually striving to improve my practice in my role as a supervisor and expand my knowledge of the research process by taking part in workshops, and accepting opportunities to examine and peer review, as well as to lead by example by presenting at conferences and publishing in accredited journals.

While these are all generic expectations of the product of supervision, according to Dietz (2010:71), “Every PhD supervisor is different and every PhD candidate as well”. As a supervisor I have been very fortunate to supervise a maximum of four students at the same time, and these students were not all at the same place on the supervision timeline. Normally I work with two to three students at any given time. The approximate time period for my masters students to complete is two to three years, and my first doctoral co-supervision spanned a period of five years. To date I have supervised one doctoral and nine masters students to completion – four of which have completed cum laude. I am currently supervising/co-supervising two masters students and one doctoral student.

During the research process I actively help students to source funding, attend workshops to improve research skills, form research communities, and to brainstorm and use research diaries to develop an introspective and reflective understanding of the research process. A research diary can mean different things to different researchers, but essentially it keeps a detailed history of the research as the process unfolds, helping to track the development of the research and be a tool for reflexive practice.

The development by the student of his or her own individual time schedule is a task that I find to be of further importance, and one which I continually revisit in an attempt to make the student take ownership of the course of the study. If there have been problems and deadlines have not been met, I expect the student to revisit the time schedule to evaluate the impact on the course of the study.

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I further encourage students to take part in seminars and conferences, and write for publications. This has only really started to happen in the last four to five years, as I have gained confidence in my own publication and conference presentation skills. Since 2011, four of my M-Tech students have co-published with me in Department of Education (DOE) accredited journals. I am collaborating with my D-Tech students and co-supervisors to publish in the next year; both students presented at conferences on issues emerging from their doctoral studies. This process has boosted my confidence as well as that of my students. I found that by writing for a publication, conference presentation, seminar or forum the student is forced to reflect on the intrinsic understanding of their research and therefore gain insight through the writing itself and from critical feedback during the process of production.

IN CONCLUSION

South African universities like NMMU are under pressure to improve numbers of PhD graduates and, in turn, have placed pressure on academic staff to advance their qualifications and to assume the role of supervisor soon after graduating. The institutions do, however, realise that in order to strengthen intellectual capacity and research output, a conducive environment is essential – if not always realistically achievable – and have put measures in place to actively work towards developing research capacity.

I believe the greatest challenge I have faced has been realising that as a supervisor I do not have to be all-knowing and flawless, and that opening myself to multiple perspectives on approaches to supervision encourages growth, diversity and self-enrichment. The process of supervision requires a broader way of thinking that allows tailor-making of the process to suit the student/supervisor dynamic. The supervisor should not be afraid to acknowledge their shortfalls in any particular context, but rather recognise them and work to the benefit of the study through co-supervision, mentorship, intervision or other such processes.

I have therefore, through reflection on my personal sense of supervision, come to the realisation that the supervisory practice is much more fluid than I previously perceived. This malleability has resulted in personal identity formation and ontological development that inspires more confidence in the final research products as well as in the supervisory process.

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A CRITICAL APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I attempt to do two things. In the first two sections I present my philosophical position with regard to my supervision practices. Here I argue, drawing from Gee's (2008) critical work on Discourse as a way of being, that the PhD journey is essentially about socialising into a particular Discourse of knowledge production. Thereafter, I show how my philosophical position informs my supervision practices, and specifically the initial processes of facilitating PhD students' acculturation into the Discourse of doing PhD research in the discipline of Information Systems.

Throughout the chapter I use the concept 'nurture' or 'nurture into' to signal that the PhD journey is about growth and about drawing from relationships students have with peers and supervisors. The discussions presented in the chapter are reflections on the initial acculturation phases of the PhD journey – a journey which is personal and which results in redefinition of both student and supervisor.

ACQUIRING A DISCOURSE

My view on the philosophical principle of supervision practice is that, in essence, it concerns nurturing experiential knowledge in students so that they may adequately construct knowledge about particular problems in specific empirical situations in Information Systems. Here I emphasise three ideas – namely Discourse, experiential knowledge, and adequate mastery – and to do so I draw from critical theory and primarily from Gee's (2008) theory on ideology in Discourse in education.

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DISCOURSE AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

Arguing from a social linguistic (not sociolinguistic) underpinning, Gee (2008:3) puts forward the idea of Discourses (with a capital 'D') as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or 'types of people') by specific groups" for different occasions and places. A Discourse is a set of related social practices that are produced by history and reflect "language-in-use-in-society" (Gee, 2008:2). It is:

a socially accepted association among ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting, as well as using various tools, technologies, or props that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network,' to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role,' or to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctively recognizable fashion. (Gee, 2008:161)

Gee (2008:3) uses a capital 'D' to signify that Discourse is more than language; it also entails creating and acting out "different 'types of people'" and is embedded in the dynamics of power, social dominance, and ideology in the use of language in context.

According to Gee (2008), the language of a Discourse does not make sense outside of the Discourse. Embedded in every Discourse that people belong to or associate with are what are regarded as common-sense everyday theories about the way of being and doing in that Discourse. Socially agreed upon meaning – the meaning of symbols, tools, behaviours, words, practices, and so on – and tacit theory allow a member of a Discourse to function and effectively relate to others who are also associated with the same Discourse. Learning in essence implies socialisation or acculturation into a particular type of Discourse. In terms of doing research, this requires mastering the particular discipline, research focus, and the broader Discourse of the academic community.

Gee (2008) distinguishes between primary Discourses and secondary Discourses. Primary Discourses are the home-based or originating Discourses "to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings" (Gee, 2008:168). Secondary Discourses are those into which people are apprenticed later in life, as they immerse themselves into (or acculturate into) a particular context, such as, for example, the education situation and the phenomenon of doing research as a PhD student. Secondary Discourses "constitute the recognisability and meaningfulness of our

‘public’ (more formal) acts” (Gee, 2008:168). According to Gee (2008), acquiring a secondary Discourse is like learning a second language.

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

As a basis for adequate mastery of a particular Discourse, Gee (2008) distinguishes between the concepts of learning and acquisition. He emphasises that in addition to theoretical learning of new concepts and their meanings, adequate mastery entails an acculturation into the social practices of the Discourse. This gives rise to the idea of experiential knowledge or practice orientatedness.

Acquisition involves acquiring a Discourse, usually through a subconscious process of practice, trial and error, and socialisation without formal teaching. Learning, on the other hand, involves conscious knowledge attained – either through teaching or through life experiences (experiential knowledge) that trigger conscious reflection about the experience (Pinker, 1989, 1994, cited in Gee, 2008). The distinction between learning and acquisition is not a simple nor unproblematic one, and typically there is a range of balances and combinations between learning and acquisition (Gee, 2008).

Gee’s argument is that education situations, as with supervision practices and embarking on a PhD journey, require from students to associate with and acculturate into particular types of Discourses (such as, in the case of my students, language-in-use-in-doing-IS-research) and ways of being considered to be better. At a PhD level especially, the research project is about embracing and socialising into an alternate way of being. Therefore, to paraphrase Gee’s (2008) quote used earlier, the research journey essentially is about acculturation into a new (or secondary) way of being, valuing, feeling, acting, writing, reading, and doing, as well as adequately using the various tools, technologies, and methods of the particular discipline and research focus, in order for students to (re)identify themselves as a member of a meaningful group or network of academics in the discipline and to demonstrate their ability to fill a particular niche in a uniquely identifiable fashion (Gee, 2008).

USING CRITICALITY TO GUIDE SUPERVISION PRACTICES

To adequately construct knowledge in the particular education situation therefore firstly implies adequate acculturation into and mastery of a new, secondary Discourse. However, in Gee’s definition of Discourse, social domination and ideology play a critical role in the shaping of meaning and ways of being in Discourses.

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Although the intent of this chapter is not to unpack power, ideology, and Discourse collisions in detail, one should be aware that accomplishment in higher education (HE) potentially implies new power and social capital which can be used emancipatorily or repressively (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Therefore, drawing from critical theory, adequate mastery of a Discourse should also include conscious and critical reflexivity about the potential for unintended disempowering supervisory practices (Ngwenyama, 1991; Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997; Howcroft and Trauth, 2005; McGrath, 2005; Stahl, 2008). As a critical theorist, I am obliged to briefly unpack the notions of critique and reflexivity as ethical conduct (Stahl, 2008).

Gee (2008) argues that participation in HE implies a preferred or dominant type of Discourse inherent to the education situation. Students are subconsciously and/or consciously expected to acquaint themselves with and adapt to a new and preferred way of knowing and valuing (Gee, 2008) that is associated with the HE institution and the particular discipline they seek to participate in. For students coming from a home-based (primary) Discourse that is similar to that of the HE institutions they are going into, the transition from one context to the other is relatively smooth, with little conflict, contestation, or need for acculturation. However, for students from minority or sidelined Discourses, or home-based Discourses that are significantly different from the Discourse of HE, the subtleties associated with making such acquisitions in the new context of HE imply conflict, contradiction, domination, and social shaping (Gee, 2008).

Gee (2008) also suggests that the values of dominant Discourses may result in those operating from within them treating people from alternative Discourses as 'others' – not like us, not part of us, or non-standard. In HE situations this may lead to the values of the 'others', especially those coming from home-based Discourses that conflict with the dominant Discourses of HE, to be devalued or damaged. In order to fit in, survive and, ultimately, achieve, marginalised students may, however, seek to take on dominant values and practices and may become complicit with values and actions that denigrate their originating Discourses. The outcome can be oppressive social phenomena that exclude, marginalise, and repress. When a student eventually masters a secondary Discourse, he or she acquires social capital and can redefine themselves within the HE context. This potentially makes them vulnerable in that they may – knowingly or unknowingly – join the ranks of the oppressors (Gee, 2008; Kress, 2011).

Adequate mastery of a Discourse should therefore include conscious reflection on these principles, whether the research itself is of critical nature or not. Moreover, the redefinition of students as better people that accompanies achievement in HE

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may carry with it ideologies and tools for repression. Hence criticality, as part of the PhD Discourse, is introduced in ways such that students, in the process of redefining themselves, do not reject or do damage to their home-based Discourses or do not join the ranks of oppressors (Kress, 2011).

CRITICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

Critical social research requires associating with a particular orientation to knowledge and value judgements (Myers and Klein, 2011). Critical researchers, for example, value critical reflexivity, emancipation, and empowerment. Moreover, they seek to challenge phenomena such as technocentricity, non-performative intent, and ideological repression (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005).

The approach I use in relation to supervision, therefore, is ultimately to enable my students, through their research, to engage in critical thinking about their lifeworlds (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997), about the Discourses where they come from, and about the Discourses they are acculturating into. I encourage students to challenge Discourses, in the sense that I try to create enabling contexts for them to grow and critically reflect. Part of this awakening involves nurturing them into a Discourse of reflexive critique about the various Discourses that form part of the IS discipline.

A key objective of critical research is to address “the oppositions, conflicts and contradictions in contemporary society, and to be emancipatory in that it should help to eliminate the causes of alienation and domination” (Myers and Avison, 2002:7). Here I am sensitised to how my own assumptions and social capital in the Discourse of academia may affect my students and possibly reinforce social exclusion. Therefore, contrary to the dominant approach of education, which represses, dominates, and controls, I promote challenging the primary Discourses we both come from and the Discourses my students are going into, and subsequently the implications of Discourse collisions in the supervisory relationship.

In the discipline of Information Systems, I find the students I meet and supervise are often trained – forced or dominated even – into a worldview where systemisation, structure, forward planning, and extreme task-orientatedness are highly valued and sought after. In effect, they are taught to embrace technology-deterministic and systematic thinking (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005; Avgerou, 2010), which constitutes a particular way of valuing and being. This is potentially ideological because, as with other disciplines, the Information Systems discipline regulates (or disciplines) the knowledge and behaviour of individuals (Foucault, 1977; Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996; Myers and Klein, 2011). Although this is indeed sensible for some of the types of work situations that they will encounter, remaining critical

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about the disruptive impacts of technology on people (such as how technology can re-enforce inequalities or capitalist ends) is a necessity in a developing country such as South Africa (Du Plooy and Roode, 1993; Walsham and Sahay, 2006; Zheng, 2009).

SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Turning to HE generally, internationally HE is biased towards a white, elite, middle-class, masculine worldview (Case, 2008; Gee, 2008; Kress, 2011). This is intensified in many ways in South Africa, where the apartheid legacy has left a situation where the divisions between middle classes and worker classes are superimposed over divisions along racial lines (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007; Quinn and Boughey, 2009; Boughey and Niven, 2012).

While access to HE essentially implies the potential for entry into middle class, it also predicts social exclusion for students whose primary and home-based Discourses are conflicting with the Discourses of HE. Much evidence of social exclusion and its implications in HE (see Jackson, 1999; Winker and Degele, 2011) is available from the participation rates of African students in HE in South Africa (Scott et al., 2007; Quinn and Boughey, 2009; Ndebele et al., 2013). At Rhodes University, where I reside, the academic culture is biased towards a white, elite, English-speaking middle-class worldview (Quinn and Boughey, 2009). Academic staff, senior and middle administrative staff, and support staff are predominantly white (Badat, 2013). Social exclusion for students embedded in non-mainstream Discourses is a reality and therefore something that must be explicitly and reflexively addressed in supervision practices. In this respect, guidance can be sought from critical theories.

Gee's (2008) view on social exclusion builds onto prior discussions on Discourse conflicts. He argues that those with a greater number of conflicts between the various Discourses they associate with and use may find themselves in a position of being members of the dominated group. Conversely, those that have the least conflict between the various Discourses they use become the dominating group (Gee, 2008). Control over Discourses and how they evolve and are shaped can lead to the acquisition of social goods (or capital).

SHAPING A CRITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

In the light of the foregoing, I find it necessary, early on in my supervisory practices, to promote (largely implicitly) Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) five key foci for shaping a critical epistemology, which had served my own search for criteria for critical research (Krauss, 2012). Although not all my students do critical research, it is

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indeed helpful to highlight reflexive tools derived from interrelated themes of critical thinking, as a way of nurturing students into adequate mastery of a Discourse, both appropriately sensitised to the potential for social domination and ideology, and empowered to resist repression.

Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) first theme is emancipation. It is a theme evident in all the different critical streams in Information Systems (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997; Čečez-Kecmanović, 2005; Myers and Klein, 2011). According to Howcroft and Trauth (2005) emancipation implies a commitment to free people from repression-sustaining power relations evident in social phenomena. McGrath (2005:88) states that the emancipatory tradition is "openly critical of the status quo, seeing the need to transform society to achieve a 'better' life for all, and is sensitized to the way that structural forces – again, largely as perceived in Western industrial societies – mediate the transformation efforts".

Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) second theme is the critique of tradition. The purpose of this theme is to disrupt – challenge and change – the status quo rather than simply reproducing it (Ngwenyama, 1991; McGrath, 2005). Citing Doolin (1998), Howcroft and Trauth (2005:3) hold that "[c]ritical research questions and deconstructs the taken-for-granted assumptions inherent in the status quo, and interprets organizational activity ... by recourse to a wider social, political, historical, economic and ideological context". Here, challenging and changing the status quo relates to exposing power, domination, social exclusion, and the way Information Systems (as a Western Discourse) is researched and practised, with a view to finding better, more emancipatory ways to empower, liberate, and educate.

The third theme is non-performative intent. This entails the rejection of "a view of action that is guided only by economic efficiency as opposed to a concern for social relations and all that is associated with this" (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005:4). In essence, valuing production of maximum output for minimum input is not an ideal in critical research.

The fourth theme relates to the critique of technological determinism. Citing Bijker (1995), Howcroft and Trauth (2005:4) explain that this challenges "discourse [small 'd'] surrounding socio-economic change ... which assumes that technological development is autonomous and that societal development is determined by the technology". These authors argue that critical literature "seeks to conceptualize technology development, adoption and use within the context of broader social and economic changes" (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005:4).

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Both technological determinism and performative intent are potential implications of uncritical and unreflective Information Systems research and practice and, in some cases, are ideas that people value and aspire to (Du Plooy and Roode, 1993; Alvarez, 2005). Alvarez (2005), arguing for the value of analysing language and semiotics in the context of social interactions in the Information Systems discipline, states that:

as researchers of IS [Information Systems], we are already examining the production and exchange of semiotic products in the form of, for example, requirements analysis and technical support calls. Moreover, language is to be thought of as social action which has a performative aspect. That is, language accomplishes 'things' in its use, such as establishing one's identity. (Alvarez, 2005:104)

The fifth theme identified by Howcroft and Trauth (2005:4) is critical reflexivity, which highlights a "methodological distinction between critical and more mainstream IS research". Critical reflexivity "questions the validity of objective, value-free knowledge and information that is available, noting how this is often shaped by structures of power and interests" (p. 4). Critical reflexivity provides the basis for reflections on the role of the researcher as a producer of knowledge, and specifically the extent to which the researcher is implicated in the mechanisms that promote repression in the social phenomena (Ngwenyama, 1991; Howcroft and Trauth, 2005). Critical reflexivity relates to the need for adequate mastery of a Discourse and consideration of how one's research actions and supervisory practices may be damaging and unethical. Stahl (2008) states that reflexivity:

means that critical researchers are willing to be critical about their own assumptions, beliefs and ideologies, and render these open to debate. If the intention is to promote emancipation, then the researcher needs to allow a critique of her own viewpoint that may preclude successful emancipation from the research subject's point of view. Similarly, reflexivity requires the researcher to consider whether the aim of the research is realistic. (Stahl, 2008:140)

In the following sections I will unpack how the philosophical principles underlying my preferred approaches to critical research manifest in my supervision practices.

SUPERVISION PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

The practices and reflections presented in this section address how apprenticeship into the Discourse of PhD research in the Information Systems discipline could be facilitated. This is by no means meant to be exhaustive or fully explanatory of the practices I adopt, but simply a presentation of examples of some reflexive tools that

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might be used for initiating acculturation into the PhD Discourse. Attention is paid to both the particularities of South African HE and to how learning and acquisition combine in the process of acculturation.

This section also shows how the idea of nurturing is operationalised in my supervision practices, given Gee's (2008) theory and the principles of reflexive critique described above. Therefore, while I describe how I initiate reflections about ideas or models, knowledge is essentially co-constructed as students reflect on, critique, and respond to my supervision guidance. So while the prior section emphasises 'tools' to reflect about power, domination, and social context, the models and ideas I discuss in the sections below should be seen as reflexive tools to assist students in their PhD Discourse acculturation endeavours.

NURTURING THE COMMUNICATION RELATIONSHIP

In the supervisory relationship I attempt to create an openness so that students feel free to ask questions, approach me with questions, and to challenge, reflect on and give feedback on my supervisory approaches. Nurturing the communication relationship relates to the concerns of power relations and social exclusion, particularly given the South African HE situation; and it is often a phase that takes time in inter-Discoursal relationship building.

Using terminology from participant-observation as a research strategy, Myers (2009) and de Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2007) refer to enculturation, being a phase where participants come to terms with a particular cultural situation. In the supervisory relationship, this implies that we (student and supervisor) need to learn about each other's Discourses or worldviews so as to establish a basis for sharing, meaning making, and understanding. I believe this is a foundation for effective inter-Discoursal and interpersonal communication – indeed, the discussions in the following sections assume this as a starting position.

BUILDING A CV (A CULTURE OF RESEARCH)

I believe that masters or PhD research is not just about getting a degree. It is also about building an academic CV and mastering the various aspects of a new Discourse – its values, beliefs, practices, tools, methodologies, ways of thinking and of participating in a particular research community. Therefore, I attempt to expose my students to the particular 'game' of the research discipline and fraternity within which they work; we co-explore the use of language and other symbolic expressions that are socially accepted in the particular discipline and aim to signal that we can play a meaningful role in the community (Gee, 2008). I therefore, help them to:

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- publish, as a way of modelling the research process, and of negotiating the typical review process that researchers are exposed to. This helps students to relate learning to acquisition, and to socialise into the process of mastering the experiential knowledge of the particular Discourse they are aspiring to;
- attend research conferences and doctoral symposiums. This especially is something that helped me develop personally as I could test some of my preliminary research ideas among international academics and gatekeepers in my topic area. Subsequently I could expose myself to the larger international Discourse in which I wanted to participate as a significant member with a meaningful contribution; and
- specialise in a particular topic or niche area. The logic underlying this derives from requirements for obtaining National Research Foundation (NRF) rating, which necessitates becoming an expert in a specific area in the discipline rather than publishing randomly on different topics. In South Africa the NRF is equivalent to the gatekeepers of the academic Discourse. I refer to the idea of socialising into a Discourse and the requirement to “signal [to the gatekeepers] (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role,’ or to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctively recognizable fashion” (Gee, 2008:161).

A HABIT OF READING

I believe in establishing a habit of reading relevant material. When I offer advice during supervisory sessions, I try to support it with appropriate readings. In effect, I model the habit of reading as a particular way of valuing and of being in the Discourse. This allows students to master Discourses through both learning (conscious reflection about theoretical concepts and research encounters) and acquisition (the subconscious process of practice, trial and error, and socialisation) (Gee, 2008). I have therefore, over time, compiled a repository of readings to which I can refer my students as a first point-of-entry. The readings cover various methodologies and paradigms, and a range of topics relating to the processual aspects of completing postgraduate research (including various aspects of ethics and academic writing). Often students add their own useful readings to the repository. I have also compiled a list of useful online resources that are quite prominent in the Information Systems research fraternity. Both these resources are constantly evolving.

The advantage of this practice is, firstly, that students learn how to read the pertinent materials so as to get advice and insight into their Discourses, and, secondly, they learn that I, as supervisor, also source my knowledge by standing on the shoulders of others. Hopefully, as I continue to establish within myself an attitude of reading and

finding readings, students will also be inspired as they pick up on the habit of finding and reading germane information.

ALIGNMENT AND THE RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION: RIGOR, RELEVANCE, AND RHETORIC

This section focuses on the alignment and contribution to research needed in a thesis and the concepts that I discuss with my students during their acculturation into the PhD journey. It addresses the idea of adequate mastery of the knowledge construction traditions of the particular Discourse students seek to achieve in. Throughout my supervisory practices, I facilitate reflections about the need for alignment between:

- paradigm, method, and contribution;
- research questions and problem statement; and
- research question, methodology, literature review, fieldwork approaches, data collection instruments, and research contribution.

As starting points and reflexive tools, I use schematic representations of the generic research process and structure (Figure 2) and of the elements of high-quality research (Figure 3). The importance of alignment and arguing the ‘golden thread’ that should run through a research contribution is visualised in Figure 2.

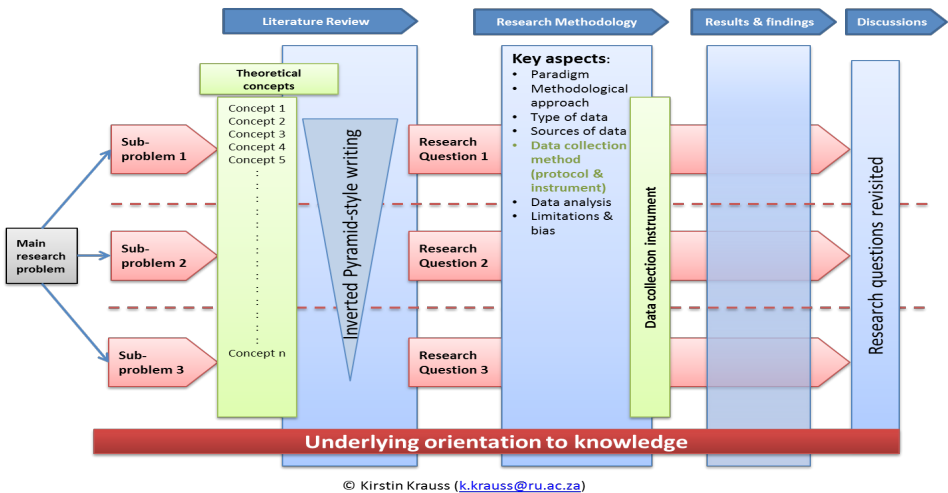


FIGURE 2 Generic research process and structure

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I use Figure 3 to show my students what is necessary for high-quality research and to show which elements should be addressed in their theses. I also refer them to Weber (2009) as a helpful paper to begin understanding the value and importance of the three Rs (Rigour, Relevance, Rhetoric) of research.

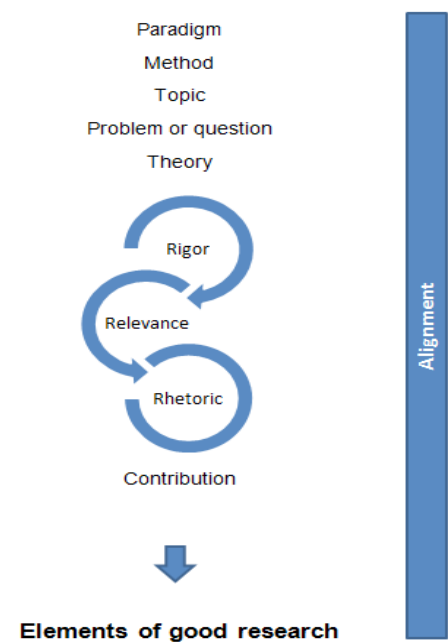


FIGURE 3 Elements of high-quality research

I have found these figures are especially useful to get students to reflect about alignment during the initial phases of acculturation.

RHETORIC, WORD-CRAFTING, AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

I found that, especially for students starting out on their PhD journeys, one of the difficult issues of publishing and writing revolves around the use of rhetoric and the demonstration of communicative competence, particularly in terms of developing an ability to adequately present argumentation in writing. There is little value in having research that is rigorous and relevant if the student is unable to present or communicate his/her work (see Weber, 2009). Rhetoric cannot be separated from relevance and rigour. Therefore, modelling the process of word-crafting with my students remains quite central to my supervisory approaches, especially during the initial phases.

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Explaining how alignment in research should be communicated is something I often undertake by using Figure 2. For example, there are inevitably themes or concepts that emerge when one presents the research problems. I discuss with my students how those concepts or themes should be revisited in more depth and detail in the literature review and data-collection instruments, and then be followed up on in the findings.

I furthermore explain to them how a literature review (or a coherent paragraph, section, abstract, or introduction, for that matter) should flow and how a literature review should ultimately lead to the identification and clarification of a knowledge gap. I refer them to the inverted pyramid style of writing schematised in Figure 4, to Webster and Watson (2002), and to some of the readings in the repository I have assembled.

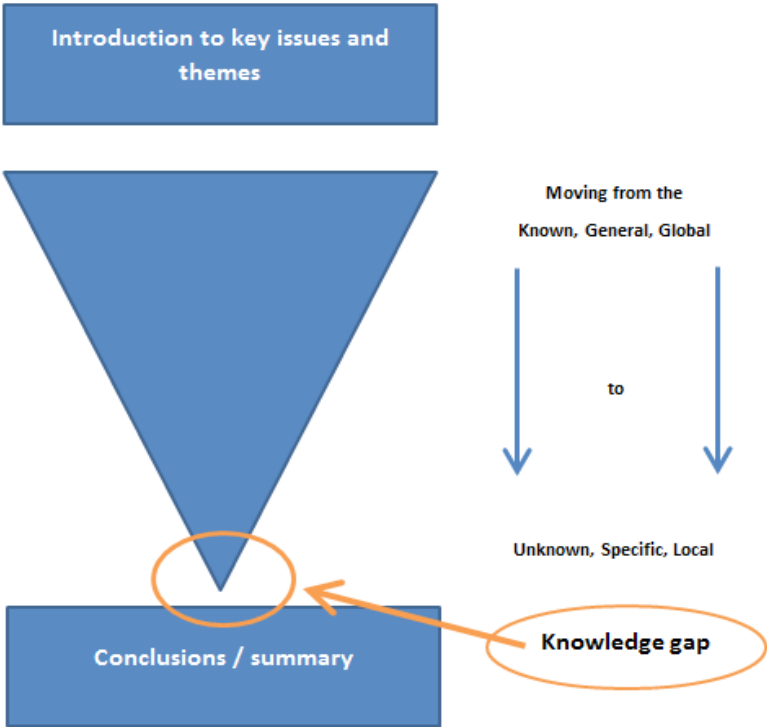


FIGURE 4 The inverted pyramid style of writing

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KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS OF A THESIS

Here it is appropriate to acknowledge the role of senior colleagues who have assumed a mentoring role during my own acculturation into the Discourse of academic research. Professor Ojelanki Ngwenyama is one such person who, at the time of writing, was facilitating an annual PhD workshop at Rhodes University for Information Systems students.

A central aspect of Professor Ngwenyama’s PhD workshop is the application of Toulmin et al.’s argumentation model (Figure 5) as a reflexive tool to assess the various knowledge claims that a thesis should make. Such claims include whether the research questions are relevant and persistent in the field; whether the theoretical framework is appropriate given the research questions; whether the methodological approach selected is appropriate for addressing the problem situation, given the theoretical framework; and whether the empirical situation is appropriate, given the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the nature of the problem (Ngwenyama, 2015). This process of reflecting on knowledge claims also involves reflecting on alignment between various aspects of the thesis (as schematised in Figure 2).

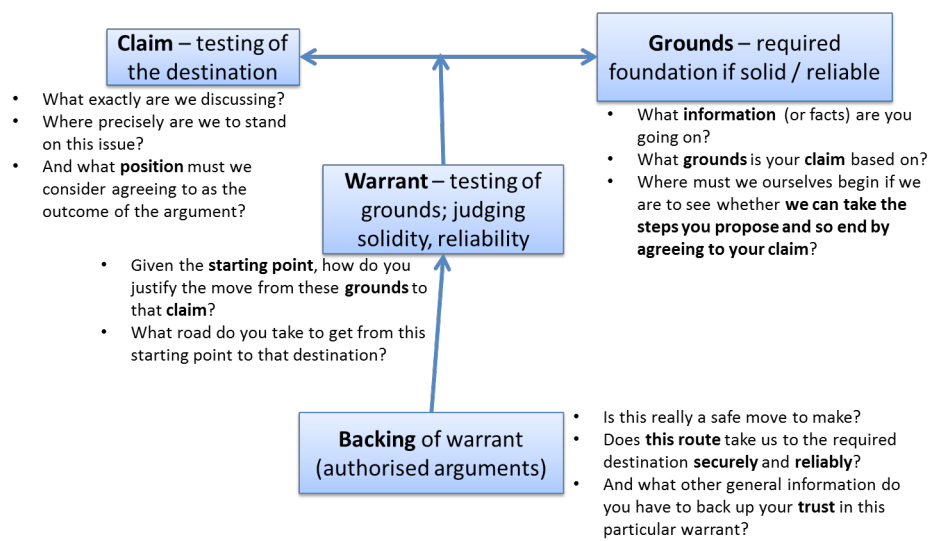


FIGURE 5 Elements of an argument (Adapted from Toulmin et al., 1984; Ngwenyama, 2015)

I find Toulmin et al.’s (1984) model extremely useful for assisting students with reflecting on the claims that a thesis should make, both in terms of the topic addressed (the contribution to knowledge of the problem or issue) and the way in which the topic

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is addressed (including the paradigm, methodological approach and principles of interpretation used). This approach assists in highlighting the importance of arguing the uniqueness and particularity of the PhD thesis's contribution to knowledge in terms of theory, practice, and methodology (Ngwenyama, 2015). Typically, we use Toulmin et al.'s model to collaboratively reflect on the various knowledge claims students are making and on whether there is adequate alignment between the various aspects of their thesis argument. Our collaborative reflection subsequently allows students to build up experiential knowledge in the new Discourses they are acquiring, particularly the mastering of argumentation skills within the Discourse.

ORIENTATIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AND ARGUMENTATION

In order to assist my students to adequately engage with knowledge assumptions and knowledge production, my supervision typically starts with introducing them to various orientations to knowledge and argumentation (Toulmin et al., 1984). More specifically, we address the question of research paradigms and adequate support of knowledge claims.

Firstly, all research in IS, whether it is made explicit or not, is underpinned by a research paradigm or an orientation to knowledge that circumscribes a set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of social reality, and how knowledge is constructed within and about that reality. The three most prominent paradigms in Information Systems are Positivism, Interpretivism, and Critical Social Theory (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Shanks and Parr, 2003; Myers, 2009; Myers and Klein, 2011).

I find it valuable to familiarise students with the two types of knowledge assumptions that are put forward in literature – namely, ontological and epistemological. They need to be clear on the distinction between ontological beliefs, which “have to do with the essence of phenomena under investigation”, and epistemological assumptions which “concern the criteria by which valid knowledge about a phenomenon may be constructed and evaluated” (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991, pp. 7-8). Students need to familiarise themselves with the knowledge assumptions of the paradigm in which they choose to work so as to provide themselves with a basis to inform alignment. Additionally, an understanding of the underpinning orientations to knowledge will give students a philosophical basis for adequately responding to unexpected fieldwork or data encounters. This exercise assists the development of those students that understand their research methodologies at the level of method as a ‘recipe’ to follow, instead of drilling down to principles of method also.

Secondly, argumentation is about adequately supporting knowledge claims with evidence and backing; knowing where to source evidence and backing;

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and knowing, for example, what to eliminate as bias and subjectivity (from the perspective of Positivism) or explain as articulated prejudices, historicity, and context (from the perspective of Interpretivism). A helpful starting point for reflecting about argumentation, claims, backing, and evidence is given in Figure 6, where I visually summarise the first chapter of Chalmers (1999), including in it some of my prior discussions from this chapter.

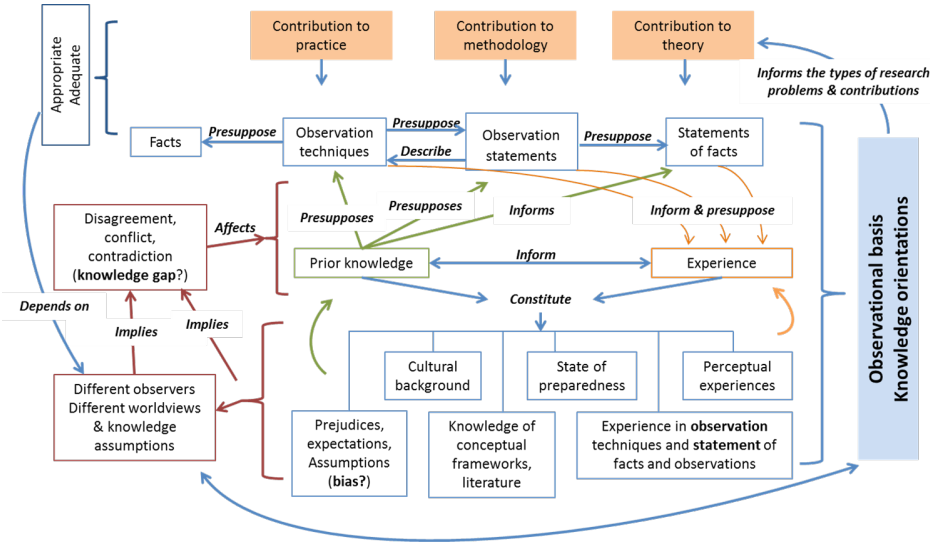


FIGURE 6 A checklist for argumentation (adapted from Chalmers, 1999)

Figure 6 is a reflexive tool for building thesis argumentation. As this illustration is far from comprehensive, the reader should engage with Chalmers (1999) to fully understand the material it draws from. As with the other practices and models I reflect on in this chapter, the purpose of Figure 6 is to induce reflection about the Discourse of argumentation and thesis contributions.

The figure indicates that prior knowledge and experiences affect an individual’s ability to observe and then to state facts, and to present observations statements. Students need to be aware that how they observe facts depends on their experience and knowledge of using observation techniques, along with a range of other phenomena. These may include an individual’s prejudices, their perceptual experiences, their knowledge of conceptual frameworks (including both formal ones sourced from literature and informal ones from life experiences) and their expectations (which are typically informed by prior knowledge of formal or informal conceptual frameworks). A role is also played by their assumptions, their state of preparedness, their cultural

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background (such as their primary Discourses), and prior experience in applying observation techniques and stating facts and observations.

Moreover, different observers may have conflicting and contradicting perceptual and other experiences that play a role in how phenomena are observed. Different knowledge traditions and observational bases may emphasise, articulate, or eliminate different things during argumentation as, for example, does the positivist tradition in comparison to research done from the perspective of a critical theorist. Common ground can be sought through literature on observation techniques (method and methodology) and from statements of facts by earlier researchers, thus filling in the gaps in knowledge and resolving disagreement.

Student researchers should be encouraged to ground their work in prior knowledge – at least formally – by providing relevant backing from the literature. Claims should be made, for example, about appropriate theoretical frameworks and, in the process, communicative competence is demonstrated. Moreover, facts and appropriately informed observation techniques should align (demonstrated by means of claims about appropriate empirical situations allied to appropriate methods) and observation techniques should be informed by rigorous exploration of relevant conceptual frameworks.

I aim to encourage my students to ensure that the research problem and claims regarding contribution to knowledge are informed by prior knowledge of conceptual frameworks, others' statements of facts and observation techniques. In turn, observation techniques and statements of facts should be informed by prior knowledge of methodology and earlier recorded disagreements. This way of presenting argumentation and aligning the various elements of the PhD thesis is indeed daunting for fresh PhDs, but I feel it is appropriate to use it for generating reflection during students' apprenticeship into the Discourse of research.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

I have found that if a student is able to frame and articulate his/her research questions, they are often also clear about what they want to do, how they will attempt to do it, and the problem situation they are trying to understand. In order to reflect on and learn to construct research questions, and to therefore adequately construct knowledge about their Discourses, I refer my students to Roode (1993), who holds that research projects always start with a problem or issue, usually expressed as a question. These questions typically enquire about the ontological, phenomenological, epistemological, and normative nature of the issue under investigation.

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Roode (1993) presents a framework with four generic research questions for assisting the researcher to explore different aspects of the problem or situation at hand (see Figure 7). As indicated in Figure 6, observational basis and knowledge orientations will inform the types of problems addressed and contributions that the thesis makes. Taking this further, Roode (1993:6) argues that “[t]he uniqueness of each problem situation will dictate which questions would be relevant, and the order in which they should be posed”.

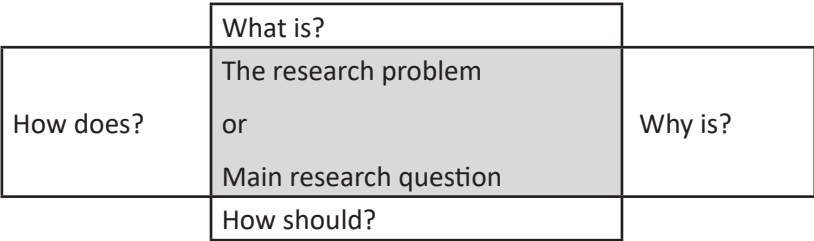


FIGURE 7 Framework with generic research questions (Adapted from Roode, 1993:7)

Roode (1993:7-8) explains the purpose of each generic research question as follows:

- ‘What is?’ questions “explore the fundamental nature or essence of the research problem, exposing the structure of the problem or the meaning of underlying concepts or ideas.”
- ‘Why is?’ questions seek “to explain the real-life behaviour or characteristics of the phenomenon, determining the relationships between elements thereof.”
- ‘How does?’ questions “are answered by direct observation of the problem or phenomenon under study, and describe its reality.”
- ‘How should?’ questions “focus on normative aspects of the problem and try to determine guidelines for recommendations based on the results of the study.”

By following Roode’s (1993) guidelines students can explore concepts and themes related to their research problem. Using the framework in Figure 7, they then formulate many rudimentary questions, based on all the different ideas and concepts that they extract during their literature reviews. These questions are then clustered and grouped together to form a consolidated set of elementary research questions. Roode (1993) calls this the “bottom-up” approach towards generating the overall research question and suitable sub-questions.

THE INFORMATION SEEKING CYCLE AND SUMMARISING LITERATURE

A central part of constructing a theoretical and observational basis for research is a student’s ability to find the right readings. Webster and Watson (2002) put forward a concept-driven approach to constructing a literature review. They also suggest that a systematic search should be followed to ensure a comprehensive set of relevant literature is identified.

Part of acculturating into the Discourse of Information Systems research requires that students become familiar with key online databases in the discipline, the university library website, and journal rankings. This helps them to find and read highly rated readings. The information seeking cycle (Figure 8) from Krauss and Fourie (2010) is a simple, yet practical way to develop information fluency.

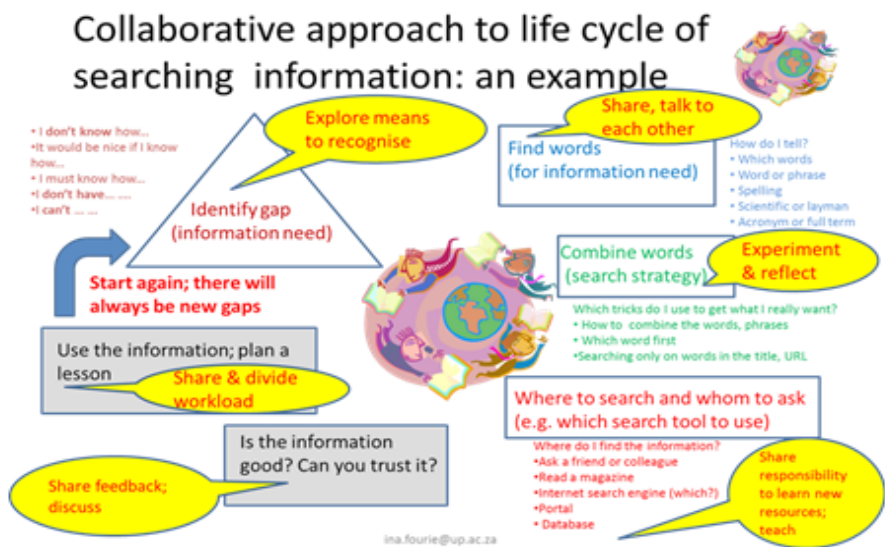


FIGURE 8 The information seeking cycle (Krauss and Fourie, 2010)

In practice, students should be encouraged to conduct their research in a recursive relationship between the information seeking cycle (Figure 8), the knowledge base illustrated in Table 1, and thesis alignment (Figure 2). This particularly takes care of learning (as opposed to acquiring) systematically during the early stages of acculturating into a new Discourse.

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CONCLUSION

In the first part of the chapter, and drawing from Critical Theory and primarily Gee's (2008) work, I presented my philosophy on the practice of research supervision. I argued that such a philosophy should be about nurturing experiential knowledge in students so that they may adequately construct knowledge about particular problems in particular empirical situations in Information Systems. In doing so, I emphasised that acquiring a PhD is about apprenticeship into a secondary Discourse and a new or institutionally validated way of being; that experiential knowledge implies that the PhD journey and supervision practices entail a socialisation process into a particular Discourse; and that adequate implies both adequate mastery of a Discourse and being critically reflexive about the possible damaging implications of mastering a new Discourse.

In the second part of the chapter, I reflected on how my philosophy is operationalised in my supervision practices – specifically, in the initial phases of facilitating PhD students' acculturation into the Discourse of doing PhD research in the discipline of Information Systems. I presented reflections around the communication situation, nurturing a culture of research, and establishing a habit of reading. I highlighted issues around alignment, rigour, relevance, and rhetoric, essential thesis claims, the importance of understanding orientations to knowledge and argumentation, the research question, and information fluency.

The practices and reflections I put forward are by no means exhaustive, but simply a practice-orientated illustration, aided by a set of possible reflexive tools, of how PhD students working in the discipline of Information Systems may be supported to begin an acculturation process into a new Discourse and how learning and acquisition combine in the process.

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SETTING THE TONE FOR CRITICAL SUPERVISION PEDAGOGY

THROUGH THE LENS OF MUSIC EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

I would wager that not many undergraduate and even postgraduate students consciously work towards supervision as a goal. The possibility only becomes relevant when the prospect of being appointed as a supervisor arrives. This chapter is an account of how that prospect might be addressed by relating my experience in finding my own voice and direction in the world of postgraduate supervision, in the course of which I reflect on my desire to find meaning in my role as a music educationist, scholar and supervisor. This I do by exploring choral education as a metaphor for the postgraduate supervision process.

I view both music education and supervision practices through the lens of a critically conscious awareness of the socio-historical contexts in which we operate. In exploring similarities between the process and product of a conductor and choir working towards a musical performance and the shared journey of a supervisor and student, my account is influenced by my interest in the role of music education, and specifically choral singing, as transformative practice in post-conflict South Africa

SUPERVISION AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN LANDSCAPE

There is broad agreement in the South African scholarly community that the number and quality of PhDs produced are insufficient. It is argued that:

For South Africa to be a serious competitor in the global knowledge economy, and to achieve standards that are internationally comparable, both the quality and quantity of PhDs need to be expanded dramatically. (ASSAf, 2010:21)

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One of the barriers to an increase in the number of high-quality PhDs has been identified as the “available supervisory capacity” (ASSAF, 2010:110). The political history of South Africa has undoubtedly had an influence on the inadequate number of successfully completed doctoral degrees as well as the supervisory capacity. Boughey (quoted in *Rhodes University, 2013*) points out that a lack in the number of qualified supervisors has an impact on the low postgraduate throughput and research in South Africa, and is reported to have stated that:

Capacity is, moreover, unevenly distributed across different institutional types with historically disadvantaged universities and universities of technology employing the lowest numbers of doctoral graduates. Given the uneven provision of supervisory capacity across the South African system, with most capacity residing in the historically white ‘traditional’ universities, there is a need for supervisory capacity to be evened out across the system. (*Rhodes University, 2013*)

It is therefore within the context of insufficient numbers of completed doctoral degrees and available supervisors in a post-conflict South Africa that I write about my personal experience as an early stage supervisor.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON SUPERVISION

I build on what I have learned from interaction with my students, from observation and literature study as well as insights I have gained from discussions with postgraduate students, colleagues, and co-participants in the course *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision*. I draw on previous research I have been involved in which highlights the responsibility of music educators to consider the many possibilities that choral singing, as an agent of change, can offer in shaping identities and enhancing cross-cultural understanding in post-apartheid South Africa (van Aswegen & Potgieter; 2010, van Aswegen; 2013, van Aswegen; 2014, van Aswegen & Vermeulen; 2014).

When I was appointed as music lecturer at the Onderwyskollege Pretoria (College of Education Pretoria) in the 1990s, the apparently homogeneous nature of the largely Afrikaans-speaking white student and staff population presented me with no linguistic challenges. From this seemingly homogenous setting, the South African landscape, including higher education, changed after the first democratic elections in 1994. In January 2001, the Onderwyskollege Pretoria “was legally incorporated into the University [of Pretoria] and became part of the Faculty of Education” (Becker et al., 2004:155). Changes in the content, structure and presentation of undergraduate programmes followed. My tasks as a lecturer changed significantly in the University context. Whereas, as a college lecturer, the emphasis had been placed on teaching and preparing pre-service music teachers, at the University I was

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given added responsibilities that included creating research output and undertaking postgraduate supervision.

There was a rapid change from a setting in which most pre-service students were white and Afrikaans- or English-speaking, to one in which students of all languages and races were ostensibly offered equal opportunities. Although a challenge, I gained much from exposure to the world of research, as well as from working in a culturally diverse environment. My experience of moving into a landscape of new possibilities has greatly influenced my work with choirs and my style of teaching and supervision.

Khene (2014:73) states that she previously regarded supervision “as a separate practice to the normal teaching we do in the classroom”, but discovered that supervision can in fact also “be seen as a form of teaching”. For my part, I discovered commonalities between the supervision style I developed and the approach I follow when teaching music.

It has been argued that the art of supervision is a more difficult task than undertaking research on one’s own behalf (Leder, 1995). The important role supervision plays in the life of a postgraduate is underlined by Campbell, Fuller and Patrick (2005:155) who state that “graduate students beginning their degrees are often unclear about what graduate education entails, what is formally and informally required of them to obtain a graduate degree [and the] academic culture”.

I am therefore aware of the immense responsibility vested in a supervisor and often wonder how novice supervisors experience their new role as supervisor. I came across neither many supervisors discussing their initial uncertainty nor much information dealing with early stage supervisors, which left me with the disconcerting idea that most supervisors glide into the role without growing pains. On the other hand, I consider it possible that many might feel uncomfortable showing, let alone sharing, their self-doubt. I discovered that my strength as a supervisor lies in my own vulnerability. The learning process as supervisor needing to find meaningful ways in which I could support, encourage and strengthen students as researchers and confident human beings has also contributed to my personal growth and fulfilment.

PARALLELS BETWEEN SUPERVISION AND CHORAL CONDUCTING

In the following section, I explore choral education as a metaphor for the postgraduate supervisory process. My experience has shown me that the tasks of conducting a choir and of supervising postgraduate students reflect numerous similarities. Arguably, the parallels offer some interesting perspectives on the comparison between

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postgraduate music education and supervision practice. Figure 9 is a schematic representation of my perception of aspects that form a similar thread throughout – on the one hand, the process and performance in choral education, and, on the other, the dissertation in postgraduate supervision. The various stages represented in this schematic representation will be considered in the following sections.

AUDITION AND SELECTION

In both choral singing and postgraduate studies, choices play an immense role in achieving success. Both entail a form of selection or audition, they need a very specialised focus and both require an extensive, intense process of planning and preparation. In a choir setting, the appointment of a conductor and selecting singers as choir members after passing an audition are similar to a student being accepted as a postgraduate student at a tertiary institution and choosing or being allocated a supervisor. Just as choices determine the conductor and his or her instruments, the role players in the postgraduate study create the human platform for the process and product of research. Selection also plays a critical role in supervision in so far as supervisors are often required to offer a list of prospective examiners the institution should choose from.

Choral Education	Postgraduate Supervision
Audition	Selection
Appointment of conductor. Selection of choir members, mainly based on musical requirements.	Appointment of supervisor. Selection of postgraduate student based on academic requirements.
Repertoire	Research scope
Choosing & planning overall choir programme, rehearsing & refining each music composition.	Making decisions/selecting appropriate topic & research questions.
Planning & Process	Planning & Process
Planning overall choir programme, rehearsing & refining each music composition.	Planning overall structure, writing & refining each chapter.
Result: Performance-driven product	Result: Performance-driven & written product
Product: Concert performance/ Participation in competition.	Product: Passing final examination/ Dissertation/Presenting findings.
Pedagogical method	Pedagogical method
Process followed to guide singers effectively to successful choral performance (final performance).	Process followed to guide students to successfully completing doctoral degree (final product).
Technical aspects/Language	Technical aspects/Language

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Choral Education	Postgraduate Supervision
Paying attention throughout process to develop voice & technical music skills.	Paying attention throughout process to develop language/writing & research skills.
Unique interpretation	Unique interpretation
Creating & developing a unique interpretation & choral sound.	Developing student’s own unique scholarly voice & guiding student to become independent.
Collaborative learning	Collaborative learning
Sharing knowledge Sharing traditional music. Taking part in Conducting & decision making regarding interpretation.	Sharing knowledge Utilising what student already has to offer. Sharing skills & knowledge-capital.
Critical pedagogy	Critical pedagogy
Transformative practice Exploring ideas on how repertoire & performance could contribute in broader sense than music making to social & cultural transformation.	Transformative practice Exploring ideas on how research can contribute to social justice & to wider community.
Long-term goal	Long-term goal
Establishing a life-long interest/ appreciation Participation in choral activities.	Guidance for successful completion of studies; Contributing to future supervision capacity.

FIGURE 9 Parallel between choral conducting and postgraduate supervision

REPERTOIRE AND RESEARCH SCOPE

The choice of the research field and the topic that leads to the title of the study and the research questions proves to be challenging to most students. This is not very different from the conductor choosing the repertoire for the choir. Both are essential to the success of the respective outcomes of the processes. Apfelstadt (2009:19) maintains that “the selection of repertoire is the single most important task that music educators face”. Ashworth-Bartle (2000:182) makes a similar point in emphasising that “one of the most important and time-consuming jobs that a conductor of ... choirs must do is choosing repertoire”. Correspondingly, it is arguable that guiding a student to find the appropriate topic and research questions are the initial vital steps to the progress and eventual success of the student. Just as the conductor first needs to select repertoire (the material that will form the basis to work with), the first question postgraduate students have to deal with is ‘What do I write about?’ The supervisor has to support the student in choosing the topic and assist with the scaling down of the existing field attached to the topic to a manageable research scope. Aside from

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the importance and time involved in repertoire selection, the suitability is also an important consideration. Pohjola (1993) writes of the importance of a conductor's ability to choose appropriate choral repertoire. On the matter of supervision, Leder (1995) points out that the starting point of supervision entails assisting the student to find the appropriate research topic.

Guiding students in their discovery of the research scope and topic they feel passionate about forms a crucial part of the successful outcome of the supervision process (Leder, 1995). A participant at the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course remarked that the value of passion and enthusiasm should not be underestimated as students stand a better chance of persevering with their studies if they are passionate about their topic. Batchelor and Di Napoli (2006:21) agree that as "most students embark on the difficult journey of doctoral studies out of passion for their subject/topic ... this passion must be safeguarded".

PLANNING AND PROCESS

An important aspect of the process in choral singing involves planning and engaging in rehearsing and refining each musical work. In the postgraduate process, the student focuses on writing and editing each chapter. During the development of this phase in both choral education and postgraduate research, the activities stimulate and enhance confidence, resilience, endurance, and appropriate skills as well as, potentially, offering the joy of a completed product.

In the same way that a conductor plans the outline of the choral year, repertoire and detailed structure of each rehearsal, I have found that a valuable step early in the process of the supervision process is to guide the student to create a 'blueprint' of the thesis. This structure offers a plan to guide the student through the process. The student would list specific themes he or she wants to address, in a specific order. These themes and the order thereof may vary during the process. However, the initial blueprint offers a clear and logical guideline to direct and shape the research problem, listing the primary and secondary research questions, offering the literature overview, planning the questions included in the interviews or questionnaires and mapping out the findings and conclusion, all within the same logical flow the blueprint offers.

RESULT AND PERFORMANCE-DRIVEN PRODUCT

Both supervision and music practices are primarily performance-driven activities, which should be experienced through active guidance or active music making. In both the writing of a thesis and a choral production the process and theory are finally

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realised in a product – a dissertation or performance – when the individual or group share their work publicly and expose it to critique.

To some extent, the supervisor can also be regarded as a conductor. In a sense, both the supervisor and choral conductor's voices are not 'heard' in the final stage (singing in the choir or writing and presenting the thesis). Both roles entail facilitating another entity (choir/student) as, in a certain sense, an involved outsider. Both conductor and supervisor play a supportive role to establish a creative outcome through another actor.

In both experiences, the fear of failure on the part of all parties plays a significant role. In music performance, anxiety or 'stage fright' is addressed in numerous research studies (Cox and Kenardy, 1993; McCormick and McPherson, 2003). Kenny and Osborne (2006) report that musicians are acutely aware of the high level of diverse skills required to achieve a successful performance and that "to achieve prominence requires the attainment of near perfection demanding years of training, solitary practice, and constant, intense self-evaluation". Music performers operate in an environment where perfectionism is the norm and they often display "excessive concern over making mistakes [and] high personal standards", along with "the doubting of the quality of one's actions" (Kenny and Osborne, 2006:109-110). In my view, both the music and research 'performer' share the fear of not achieving the required standards. Both are exposed to high expectations and criticism in settings in which they often feel isolated.

Khene (2014:74) writes about the fear students experience at the beginning of their postgraduate studies and "a fear to develop and operate in a new learning environment". The fear of failure is a general, and very real, obstacle in all areas of life. One important aspect of choral conducting as well as in supervision is to inspire students and strengthen their self-belief in their ability to succeed. According to Khene (2014:74), the history and the socio-political context of developing countries, including South Africa, needs to be taken into account when interacting with postgraduate students. As Wadee et al. (2010: 86) confirm, many PhD candidates themselves "have experienced the harsh conditions of poverty, inequality, lack of access to basic facilities and human rights abuses during the time of apartheid, with some of these also continuing up until this day".

PEDAGOGICAL METHOD

The pedagogical method of the conductor should answer the questions: 'How do I guide the singers to a successful choral performance?', and 'What approach do I follow to facilitate choral singing; to prepare, practise, revise, reflect and improve?'

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Similarly, the supervisor is confronted with the question: 'What approach or method do I follow to guide the student successfully through the doctoral process?', and 'How do I support the student in a way I would regard an 'ideal supervisor' would perform this task?' Decisions are constantly made – instinctively or consciously – concerning what method to follow to lead to the best possible product.

When starting the journey as supervisors, one obvious route to follow is mapped out by what we have learnt from our own former supervisors. Even if a student relates well to the supervisor's style, or is lucky enough to benefit from an excellent role model in their supervisor, students often underestimate, or are simply unaware of, the rich opportunities presented by supervision to experience in-service preparation for a future role as supervisor. Both the student and supervisor often focus on successfully completing the degree without reflecting consciously on the supervision process and how a changing world influences supervision styles.

Campbell, Fuller and Patrick (2005:159) argue that "mentoring, unlike advising, is not just a professional relationship, developed to advance the specific educational and personal goals of the student" but that it also "involves giving advice, sharing experiences, acting as a source of information and support and providing an example of correct ethical and scientific conduct". Wade et al. (2010:91) distinguish between the term 'coaching', defined as "a short term, formal and goal oriented" skill that needs teaching and practising, and 'mentoring', described as "a long term, informal and field- and personality-based" activity. They point out that "a good mentor has often himself been mentored well, and therefore understands both the value and process of passing on a lifetime of experience, sharing connections and possibly 'grooming a successor'".

Leder (1995:5) warns that "the supervisor's preferences and prejudices can constrain the scope, perspectives, methodology and direction of a student's work", which can be included as one of the reasons some students fail to complete their studies. The requirement for constant self-reflection and adaptation of a personal supervision style or route seems to be a given; to offer the best possible supervision often takes more time than planned. Many academics acknowledge the challenge of too much to do in so little time (Campbell, Fuller and Patrick, 2005:159; Khene, 2014:75).

The supervisor's and conductor's approach reflect the ability to inspire and motivate the student, and the art of constructive feedback. All role players have to be willing to revise and re-assess repeatedly. One of my colleagues reflected that most students who succeed are not necessarily the "cleverest with the highest IQs, or the best philosophers", but they are those who have the ability to persevere and who demonstrate a high level of resilience. The same could be argued with regard to

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choral singing. The successful outcome of a choral performance often depends on positive teamwork and diligence, rather than talented individual soloists.

Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) describe the importance of focusing more on the process than the final product in assisting students to grow as independent scholars. Freer (2011:165) maintains that in choral work, “the terms ‘performance’ and ‘pedagogy’ are not completely parallel”. He reasons that students should be involved in a collaborative process, experience a richer learning process (for example improving music reading skills) and benefit more from the experience than a successful concert. The potential value of both choral education and the postgraduate journey then exceed the limits of the final product.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

The choir conductor and supervisor are both – in a different sense – supporting the singers or students to find their appropriate voice. In both milieus, the voice sets the tone for the unique sound quality of a choir or the unique scholarly voice of the postgraduate student. As voice training exercises and attention to technical musical aspects play a role throughout the choral process, so too does guidance concerning writing practice and research skills, understanding and choosing appropriate research methods, and determining elements in the supervision process.

Language is often understood as a means of portraying ideas and it plays a determining role regarding content, as well as the overall technical quality. Since English is currently the dominant language of academia in South Africa, many scholars have to deal with the challenge of writing and presenting their studies in their second or third language. Language and writing skills can be a barrier even for promising students with much potential, including at doctorate level (Kamler, 2006). Kamler (2006:1) observes that “failure to successfully complete the doctorate has been linked to student writing problems”.

Khene (2014:74) discusses the influence of working at a university “which is located in a developing country” on her style of supervision. She refers to Rhodes University (South Africa), whose policy emphasises that educators should be aware of, and sensitive to “the effects of the history of South Africa” and the role it plays “in supporting the development of students from disadvantaged backgrounds”. She finds such an approach essential because “[t]he student ... becomes estranged from the ‘language, culture and practice of the context’ and feels reduced to a type (unengaged individual), with less of a desire to participate” (Khene, 2014:76).

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In a similar way, the language of music presents challenges in the landscape of music education. In my experience, the level of fluency and confidence in using English as academic language, as well as Western music literacy, can have an immense impact on the student's experience and confidence. There is tension with regard to the roles of Western and African music systems in music and choral education (van Aswegen and Potgieter, 2010), as there is tension with regard to the roles of English and mother-tongue languages in education.

Particular sensitivity is required to function as choral conductor, supervisor or educator in a world where Western music notation forms the theoretical basis of the choral work. Fluency in reading and writing Western music notation can be challenging for many students who did not enjoy the opportunity of obtaining a formal Western music education. On the one hand, we are in a fortunate position, in South Africa, to offer our diverse student population a platform where both African traditional music, with the emphasis on oral tradition, and Western music systems may be equally valued. On the other hand, past inequalities necessitate that music students should be supported to gain exposure to and knowledge of skills and insights into African music systems, as well as being equipped to feel comfortable in conversing in a Western music notation system.

As a fellow South African, I agree with Khene that "the context I work in, which is located in a developing country, has a significant influence on how I supervise" (2014:74). The ideal seems that our work and interaction with students may enrich all role players academically, as well as on a personal level within a given socio-cultural setting.

UNIQUE INTERPRETATION AND CREATIVITY

The processes preceding a choral performance and postgraduate thesis largely depend on resourcefulness and creativity. Decisions and choices form building blocks to create a unique outcome. The choir conductor makes decisions regarding tempo, accents, style, dynamics, and accompaniment, thereby determining a specific interpretation to offer a unique colour to the performance of each work in the programme. Each choir develops an individual choral sound, and each song is performed uniquely, based on the choir's ability and the conductor's personal style and guidance.

On the other hand, the supervisor can play a vital role in guiding the student in the process of taking decisions, making choices, establishing a creative and unique approach, and finding his or her own unique scholarly voice. Pearson and Brew (2002:139) advise that "the overriding goal of ... supervisory responsibilities is to

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facilitate the student becoming an independent professional researcher and scholar in their field". In a similar vein, Khene (2014:74) declares that "[a]s a supervisor, I have seen my role as a facilitator in transforming the scholarly research identity of my students, so that they can realise their potential".

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND SHARING

The role and responsibilities of supervisors and the supervisor-student relationship keep evolving in an ever-transforming world. Supervisors have to adapt to this changing world, new challenges and new approaches. Pearson and Brew (2002:139) have found that "[n]ot only is the role of the supervisor complex, as research practice changes and supervisory arrangements become more varied, it is also changing".

Khene (2014:74) bases her supervision approach on Freire's humanising pedagogy, where the teacher (or supervisor) ceases to be the leader who manipulates or oppresses, but rather someone who follows a student-focused process. This approach can be described as partnership-centred, as opposed to supervisor-driven. In this learning experience, the supervisor gains as much as the student does. However, in my practice I feel that one should acknowledge the challenge to create a safe environment and build an understanding while, at the same time, maintaining professional boundaries, in which the main focus is kept on academic growth and the completion of the degree. Establishing a balance between building a partnership, as well as being responsible for monitoring the student's progress, remains a challenge. The aim cannot be to obliterate power relations altogether – they exist and the supervisor needs to take the lead – but to be aware of the way in which they are managed and enacted. The idea of sharing the responsibility as learning partners links to humanising pedagogy.

Although supervisors have a certain wealth of knowledge, experience and skills to share, they learn and grow along the way through involvement in supervision as a transformative learning process. I recognise the challenge of continuously learning, also from my students, in a constantly changing world. Acknowledging the value of students' abilities and knowledge can strengthen respect and positive relationships between the supervisor and student. Both student and supervisor find themselves in a position where they can learn from each other and share knowledge, thereby enhancing mutual respect.

Students enrolling for music education at postgraduate level come with a wealth of knowledge and experiences in both spontaneous and instructed music making. Their unique cultural traditions can potentially strengthen their postgraduate journey and enhance their scholarly growth as researchers. In this regard, Mezirow (1997:9)

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argues that critical reflection on “the assumption of others” is essential to gain insight in order to identify change needed, and that “[b]ecoming critically reflective of one’s own assumptions is the key to transforming one’s taken-for-granted frame of reference, an indispensable dimension of learning for adapting to change”. This point of view links with Freire’s belief that “adult education aims at fostering critical consciousness among individuals and groups [...]”. It provides us with a voice, with the ability to name the world and, in so doing, construct for ourselves the meaning of the world” (Dirkx, 1998:3). To validate students’ existing knowledge and competencies alongside their growth as scholars, empowers students’ sense of self and reflects the philosophy of humanising pedagogy.

As choral conductor, I often encouraged choir members to share in decision making regarding the interpretation of a piece. The choir members also enjoyed the opportunity to act as conductor during rehearsals as well as at concerts. Students often suggested and taught the choir African traditional songs, and I have composed a choral work entitled “Diphofa” (Wings) for which one of my students wrote the Sepedi¹ text.

I have realised the possibilities of a richer process, in which choristers and conductors, as well as students and supervisors, could gain much from a partnership. Collaboration has the potential to encourage academic scholarship and prepare the student for his or her role as a potential future researcher and supervisor.

One approach to teamwork involves co-publishing by supervisor and student. This particular form of collaboration can form a crucial part of inducting the student into the academic community of practice. Clowes and Shefer (2013:33, 44) point out that there is an increasing expectation worldwide that postgraduate students, “especially at the doctoral level, should be productive as authors during their studies”, not only – as often prescribed by tertiary institutions – after their study has been completed. They refer to Aitchison, Kamler and Lee, who state that “authorship development interventions such as team research ... and experienced assistance (through mentorship and/or co-authorship) is increasingly underlined as valuable for developing and supporting emerging authors” (Clowes and Shefer, 2013:33-34). However, I take note of Wade et al. (2010:85) warning that involving PhD students in a larger project or programme needs to be carefully managed as “PhD supervision is a separate task from project management and there may be conflicts of interest”.

1 “Sepedi” (North Sotho) is an indigenous African language that is one of the eleven official languages in South Africa.

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Clowes and Shefer (2013:39) argue that students publishing with supervisors benefit greatly from the experience: these students “become confident in their positions as researchers, authors, writers [and] publishers”. Paul and Marfo (2001:542) maintain that establishing a collaborative research culture may offer many benefits. Despite the fact that most researchers thrive on working individually and that shared research can in some instances be “difficult and even disastrous”, they have found that there are three considerations that inspire researchers to collaborate. These are a shared interest in the education and training of doctoral students; an “intellectual curiosity ... [and] the wish to know more about the logics and contributions of other perspectives”; and finally, “the need for assistance in conducting research that extends beyond the methodological boundaries of one’s own research” (Paul and Marfo, 2001:542).

Allowing students space to develop and express their ideas (within boundaries set by the supervisor), and considering new approaches, could offer positive and rewarding outcomes. In order to develop students as independent scholars and to question and reflect on our own supervision and research approaches, this interaction may result in a certain tension and vulnerability. The other side of the coin offers an opportunity for academic, as well as personal growth of both student and supervisor.

REFLECTING THROUGH THE LENS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

When reflecting on the tenets of humanising pedagogy, I realise that the same principles that are expressed by the music educationist, David Elliott (1995), in his Praxial approach to music education philosophy, as well as in the theory of Transformative Learning originally introduced by Freire (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008; van Aswegen & Vermeulen, 2014), also apply to supervisory practices. Music and choral education, as well as supervisory practices, have the potential to act as change agents in shaping cultural identities and enhancing cross-cultural understanding (van Aswegen & Vermeulen; 2014). Supervisors are in a position to encourage deliberate enhanced awareness of humanising pedagogy and the way in which communication and mutual respect may enhance the personal and scholarly as well as personal growth of both student and supervisor. In Transformative Theory, reflection forms an important part of a growing awareness amongst all role players, which has the potential to foster greater social awareness. Recognising and consciously acknowledging the role of the socio-cultural environment in which we exist may have a positive influence on the supervisor’s and student’s experiences, without compromising the level of input and high standard of work required by both student and supervisor.

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Bradley (2006:2), who attempts “to decolonize our understandings of multiculturalism, specifically in music education”, deals with the sensitive aspect of racial and cultural differences. She advises that we should “find ways to work through the discomfort that talking about race invokes, so that we are able to communicate with our students better and to help them understand the power issues inherent in radicalized societies, as well as music education practices incorporating multiculturalism” (Bradley, 2006:3). I concur with Bradley on the importance of consciously addressing and communicating transformative possibilities through our educational practices, namely that “[we] need to intentionally help our students make the connections between the songs we sing and the social realities to which the songs are evidence by engaging in an integrative antiracist multiculturalism” (2006:12).

Both postgraduate supervision and music education practices have the potential to address what Bradley (2006) refers to as “human subjectivity and critical pedagogy” to promote an awareness of power issues and respect for socio-cultural diversity. Both music and postgraduate educators have the potential to create an awareness of the potential powerful influence our views, attitudes and actions might have on the society we exist in.

I have realised that the choral conductor Pohjola’s (1993:112) contention that “[choral singing] experiences pave the way for an acceptance of diversity and variety in human life” could also apply to the way we interact with, guide, and encourage our postgraduate students. As Celik (2013:15) explains, “[d]octoral education is a process that includes teaching different philosophies, cultures, and lifestyles on the way of becoming a world citizen”. Of relevance here is Khene’s (2014:74) warning that the supervision relationship should not be hindered by factors such as “gender, race, communication style, age, language and so forth”. I also came to new insights when studies focusing on transformative practice and critical pedagogy (see for example Mezirow, 1978, 1997; Dirkx, 1998; Schmidt, 2005; Bradley, 2006, 2007; Taylor, 2008) opened my mind to the importance of re-assessing my own approach and philosophy as educator.

Reflection on supervision practices not only shaped my view on guiding postgraduate students, but also my perspective on encouraging discourses with undergraduate students. The following is an account of a teaching experience that provided opportunities for both students and educator to question values and assumptions about appropriate conversations around issues of racial importance. My undergraduate third year students had to present micro-lessons in groups, in which they presented a chosen type of folk song. The students had to demonstrate their methodological abilities to introduce and teach a song successfully. Part of

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the assignment involved offering information on the background, context and characteristics of the specific type of folk song. The group who chose an African American Spiritual included slides, with images of slaves taken from Africa to North America, offering a background regarding the origin of these songs.

During the peer-assessment and discussion that followed each group's presentation, this class' reflective session resulted in a very lively and meaningful discussion. Some students reflected that they had experienced the illustrations to be disturbing and that this might upset sensitive learners in the same way it had touched them as students. The students discussed whether children should be exposed to such visual illustrations. Some pointed out that sensitive children should be taken into consideration, while others argued that children are used to a vast overload of media and that it is necessary for them to be exposed to realities and the real-life context of the origin of the song. The discussion referred to the relevance of discussing the context of spiritual songs in a post-apartheid society and that we, as music educators, have not only the opportunity but also the obligation to encourage further dialogue on humanity, social justice, respect and cultural diversity. This experience deepened my understanding of Bradley's arguments on critical pedagogy and the potential role of paving the way for debate on racial issues through music education and supervision practices.

Based on the principals of Freire, Schmidt (2005:3) explains the term 'conscientisation' as "the process of becoming critically conscious of the socio-historical world in which one intervenes". Both postgraduate supervision and music education practices can be viewed from the perspective of conscientisation. Schmidt expresses his concern that educational institutions "have become places for social reproduction" and "no longer provide tools for critical thinking and transformative action". Conscientisation has the potential to create a platform, not only for more open discussions dealing with power issues in a supervisor-student relationship, but also for engagement with the broader social context. Exposure to thinking within the framework of conscientisation has shaped the way I think, interact with students and consequently influences our research focus and content.

For a choir to be successful and operate in unity, trust and shared values are essential and everyone should feel accepted and valuable for his or her unique contribution. I view choral activities as a space where cultural diversity is celebrated through singing and where the singers respect and share each other's experiences and knowledge. Reflecting on critical pedagogy and rethinking my personal approach opened my mind to view the world of music education and postgraduate supervision through a different lens.

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LONG-TERM GOAL

The need to develop supervision capacity in South Africa led me to the belief that my own supervision approach should, apart from guiding the student to complete his or her studies successfully, also include an approach that will equip the student for a potential future role as supervisor. Acknowledging and addressing the influence of the South African socio-political landscape on PhD students completing their studies has the potential to contribute to a long-term goal of increasing the successful throughput at a university.

By exploring similarities between choral education and supervision practices, I have been able to draw parallels between the audition and selection process; the choice of music repertoire and a specific research topic while determining the appropriate scope; choosing suitable methodologies; and offering attention to technical aspects resulting in a unique final performance or product. Both supervision and choral practices are performance-driven processes in which the conductor or supervisor facilitates collaborative learning and has the ability to shape ideas.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting through the lens of critical pedagogy, I re-evaluate the significance of the process and the potential of supervisors and choral conductors to encourage social awareness, respect and responsibility. The learning process, as supervisor, to find meaningful ways in which I can support, encourage and strengthen students, as researchers and confident human beings, has strengthened my own personal growth and fulfilment. As music educationists, scholars and supervisors in a super-complex world, we experience a lifelong learning process. Regardless of our position in the world, we continuously share and learn from each other.

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POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION AT A YOUNG UNIVERSITY

THE ROLE OF SUPERVISION INITIATIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Universities face tremendous pressure to develop high-calibre knowledge workers who will produce new, cost-effective and environmentally friendly solutions to complex economic and social problems. Olibie, Nwabugo and Ezoechina (2015:156) argue that knowledge-based economies look to universities to produce advanced knowledge that will bring about change, growth and prosperity in super-complex globalised environments. Innovation, creativity, lifelong learning and scholarship through research are argued to be at the forefront of these solutions (Mutula, 2011:184; Olibie et al, 2015:156), which makes postgraduate research a very complex and ever changing area of university activity (Grant, Hackney and Edgar, 2014:43) and supervision a crucial element in the development of the new generation of academics and knowledge workers.

This is not the only challenge that young universities are facing. There are also threats of brain drain as veteran supervisors and senior researchers reach retirement, leaving the faculties in the hands of academics who have not been prepared for effective research supervision and quality knowledge production (Olibie, Nwabugo and Ezoechina (2015:157). Pearson and Brew (2002:135) point out that this pressure on universities has prompted governments worldwide to provide funding to heighten research momentum, efficiency and quality. As research becomes increasingly recognised as vital to economic growth, research education has become a matter of greater concern for both governments and the public.

According to Barnett (2011) and Bawa (2011) universities also have to function within the realities of the societies in which they are embedded and address pertinent

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issues such as social inequalities, prejudices, power struggles and inequitable resource distribution which all impact on the ability to access universities, to benefit from learning and to develop research capabilities. As universities lie in the midst of societal diversity and development, there cannot be a single overarching approach to knowledge creation, innovation and research. Barnett (2011) further states that the diversity and complexity of the communities within which the university exists necessitate a wider assortment of approaches to establishing and supporting knowledge production through research. Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:875) attribute the drive towards different approaches to supervision to the “multiple transformations” that have taken place in societies worldwide, making research supervision an extremely challenging and fluid activity characterised by continuity, change and complexity (Grant, Hackney and Edgar, 2014). The quality of research output depends on the quality of the supervisor, supervisor-student relationship and the quality of the whole process and context of supervision (Severinsson, 2015:195).

It is in this context that this chapter has been written following an intensive staff development course, *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision*, which proved to be very important to me as a novice supervisor. Such workshops are crucial for new supervisors as they confront the fallacy that completion of the PhD automatically transforms the doctoral graduate into an effective supervisor. These workshops prepare supervisors for the new challenging role they have to play by providing the strategies required for successful supervision. They provide the platform for novice supervisors to look critically at their practices and benchmark these against the experienced supervisors regarding their practices, treatment of students, the urgency that they give to the students’ submissions, and the nature of feedback that they provide. This chapter makes a case for such staff development opportunities being provided to academics as they complete their doctoral studies (Lategan, 2014; Pearson and Brew, 2002). Nothnagel (2015) emphasises the importance of supervisory skills development on an ongoing basis to meet the changing and demanding requirements on postgraduate supervision, while Olibie, Nwabugo and Ezoechina (2015) contend that mentoring plays a vital role in the development of new researchers with the skills necessary be independent and able to promote quality knowledge production.

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH I SUPERVISE

MacGregor (2013) cautions that the African continent needs to speed up the process of production of PhD holders not only for economic growth, but also to replace the current cohort of researchers. This warning supports the concerns raised

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by Mouton in Dell (2010) that South Africa has no other option but to grow its number of doctors to enable the country to grow its knowledge economy. In 2013, South Africa produced 2 015 doctorates, significantly less than the target of 5 000 set for 2030 (National Development Plan, 2011). The call for such enormous growth in throughput may be too steep especially within the context described by Nothnagel (2015:90) as “fraught with inherited injustices, deeply-rooted political identities an inherent suspicion of authority and a small academic educational research community”. Universities of Technology, in particular, come from a tradition of providing quality vocational training, where the production of knowledge was not seen to be central for the academics working in technikons, which did not offer postgraduate education. The offering of postgraduate studies and the subsequent shift in institutional nomenclature to ‘University of Technology’ entails major changes in the identity and practices of all involved.

It is thus clear that the context in which I am supervising is pressure-laden. There are tensions for the faculty to deliver on its promise to the university to boost research output without necessarily having the required capacity to do so. As a new supervisor I have to play my part in helping the faculty address such problems. This calls for being strategic in dealing with big numbers of under-prepared students in order to ensure quality output. Unfortunately, the kind of quality that is envisaged cannot be ensured without training, mentoring and guidance from experienced supervisors. The call to grow the number of postgraduate studies needs to be accompanied by structured efforts to develop supervision capacity.

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (DUT)

DUT is one of six Universities of Technology which are included in the 26 public higher education institutions in South Africa. It is regarded as a medium-sized institution with an enrolment of 27 000 students. As a University of Technology, DUT is fairly young and was formed in 2002 through the merger of two technikons (Natal Technikon and ML Sultan Technikon). Such mergers were the result of the drive by the South African government to redress past higher education sectorial disparities. While in the past both traditional universities and technikons were categorised as higher education, the focus regarding all aspects of their work was different. Raju (2006:5) points out that the main educational task of technikons was to provide education and training in order to supply the industries with middle-level and high-level personnel with industry-specific skills and technological and practical knowledge for effective productivity, as opposed to the role of traditional universities to develop theoretical knowledge with a strong focus on research.

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This implies that the newly formed Universities of Technology are expected to fulfil similar mandates to traditional universities driven by teaching, research and community engagement as performance pillars leading to capacity challenges, funding shortages and productivity pressures. With 1099 postgraduates in 2016 (DUT Research Office 2016), DUT only registers 4% postgraduate students instead of the 7% benchmark. Such statistics greatly influence the ethos and practices in this environment in which I completed my doctoral degree and now emerge as a new supervisor.

On completion of my doctoral degree I was prompted by the university research office to submit my three-year research plan. This, together with the Faculty of Management Sciences' postgraduate expansion plans, put a lot of pressure on me as an emerging supervisor. The assumption is that anyone completing a doctorate is ready to start supervising postgraduate research by virtue of having been supervised. In my experience, as I outline below, this is not necessarily true and such expectations can actually serve to undermine the confidence and capabilities of the novice supervisor.

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

The Faculty of Management Sciences is the biggest faculty at DUT in number of departments and student enrolment. In response to the national call to increase postgraduate output, the faculty initiated Project 500 in 2013 aimed at enrolling 500 masters and doctoral students in 2014. Inevitably, those who applied were accepted on a first-come-first-served basis without any screening. Screening of postgraduate students for fitness, readiness and commitment is crucial to improving the success rate. Furthermore, the decision to offer postgraduate studies free of charge at DUT may have widened opportunities for physical access but did not in itself enhance opportunities of epistemological access. The institution struggles with under-prepared students who are not aware of academic research practices or of the extent of their commitment in registering for such programmes. The end result is that quite a number of students have become demoralised and inactive because they find postgraduate studies very challenging and have not been adequately prepared for its demands. Supervisors feel similarly unsettled by the enormous supervision loads and lack of progress in developing the required expertise or support in managing such loads.

We are already preparing for the second round of intake and we have been advised to drop the concept 'Project 500' as we have moved beyond the project stage into building a research enterprise within the institution. The rapid increase of

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postgraduate students has brought with it a number of additional responsibilities for supervisors. For example, the number of research proposals to be considered creates frustrations for supervisors with some being perceived to act as 'gatekeepers' when they review the proposals stringently. The number of applicants far exceeded 500 and the faculty was not able to allocate supervisors to all the applicants. To absorb the big number of applicants, the committee agreed that each supervisor should have a minimum of 20 students to supervise and also recruited supervisors from other universities.

As Maritz & Prinsloo argue (2015:3) we as new supervisors had to learn how to supervise 'on the go' because faculties assume new supervisors to be 'always/already' on completion of their doctoral studies (Manathunga and Goozee, 2007:309). We had to try and duplicate the positive practices of our former supervisors and avoid those which we felt were unhelpful. While there were a number of research meetings, these inevitably focused on necessary logistics and administrative matters and left scant room for deliberation as to how to supervise effectively. There was a one-day course for supervisors but this was designed to increase and improve on reviewing the numerous proposals that serve before the faculty committee. Furthermore, the lack of capacity is such that often such support has to be provided by colleagues who have not themselves supervised any significant number of postgraduate students to graduation.

The *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course came at just the right time for me because I needed to learn about alternative approaches and most especially how to deal with the big numbers of under-prepared students we were expected to take on. When I saw the advert for the workshop I felt I could not miss the opportunity as I found myself overwhelmed with everything that was going on at Faculty Research Committee meetings. Clearly I needed to go on a retreat for someone to explain what was going on and prepare me for the new role of postgraduate supervision. The course began with a three-day face to face session in an environment combining novice and experienced supervisors with two facilitators who had been in the same predicament as we novice supervisors were currently in and who exuded empathy for our difficulties.

The big elephant 'postgraduate supervision' was dissected and each part was given a name and a role and then it was put back together. This phase was followed by three months of online interaction, comprising case studies, question-and-answer sessions, experience sharing and so on. By the time we converged for the last three-day session of phase three we were better informed than when we first met and had fostered a sense of community. The last session was followed by the development of

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a 12-page assignment which required us to read journal articles on postgraduate supervision and reflect on our own contexts and approaches.

This training gave me confidence to do what I do and enabled me to give names to what I do. By being able to name issues and find literature that related to that aspect, I gained a sense that I was not alone in this process. I know that I would still be struggling in the dark had I not attended the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course. At DUT, this course was then followed up with a series of workshops on research ethics and finally a three-day session on Supervising the Literature Review conducted by Rhodes University. This workshop also came at the right time as my first group of students were busy with their literature reviews.

Clearly models such as cohort supervision (Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011) group and team supervision (Samuel and Vithal, 2011; McKenna, 2016) are worth exploring in a faculty and department faced with big numbers. These approaches will allow the two supervisors in the department to deal with the 40 students that we have recruited plus those that we have been allocated. We are working on grouping them according to topics (such as tourism, environmental management and management) and we are now dealing with their supervision together. This will also mean that even if I am not around, the students are still able to get assistance from my colleague and vice versa. It is important at this stage to mention that the number of students that we both supervise in the department has dropped drastically in 2016 from the initial 32 to about 12 active students (2013, 2014 intake) as 62.5% has become inactive or dropped out. None of these students have graduated although we hope to see 5 of the active 12 graduating in April 2017.

The faculty has initiated a number of research methodology workshops which the students attend to get their research proposals ready and the writing centres (found across all campuses) help a great deal with editorial and other writing issues. The faculty has also designed a number of forms that are used regulate the administrative and procedural duties of the supervisor to make expectations more overt (Pearson and Kayrooz, 2004:100). However, I should mention that if I want to be a good supervisor, I cannot expect to always deal with all my students in a group. There are individual issues that require one-on-one interaction. So while I am now offered examples of alternative approaches and, through the course, am provided with a stronger sense of community, the enormous workload remains a pressing concern.

A CASE FOR POSTDOCTORAL AND RESEARCH SUPERVISION DEVELOPMENT

As universities become increasingly aware of the need to develop their academics as teachers who can respond to the multiple needs of our diverse students, so it

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becomes evident that it is equally important to prepare academics who are recent doctoral graduates for the new role of research supervision. Nothnagel (2015:91) cautions against the assumption held by South African universities and inscribed in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (2013) that completion of doctoral studies qualifies one to be a postgraduate supervisor. Maritz & Prinsloo (2015:1) and Severinsson (2015:196) see the process of becoming an effective supervisor as a formative one which requires support and nurturing if the quality of supervision is to improve in a world of growing expectations and conflicting pressures with increased emphasis on “skills formation and timely completion” (Lee, 2007:680). Lategan (2014) talks of the whole research process that novice supervisors have to be inducted into by the faculty and Grant et al. (2014) refer to the need for effective supervisors to be acutely aware of the traditions, customs and beliefs of their discipline, while Lee (2007) argues the case of conceptual approach to research supervision. Grant et al. (2014:43) further argue in favour of supportive spaces to develop capable and innovative supervisors who will be able to inspire their students. Manathunga and Goozee (2007:310) suggest a learning cycle for novice supervisors where they get practical support from veteran supervisors, and learn the rules of the game through action learning projects, joint supervision and publications. Grant et al. (2014); Lategan (2014); Bitzer (2010); and Lye (2004) make a case for postdoctoral development support for novice supervisors if the quality of supervision is to improve. Lye argues that such training is important in order to avoid the research pitfalls already identified; Bitzer (2010) agrees that training is a key to good supervision; while Mohammad (2014:35) cites supervision conferences, research supervision codes of practice and university handbooks that help provide skills and knowledge on good supervision practices.

In support (Lee, 2007:680) posits that the length and depth of concepts that the supervisor has acquired will have an effect on the quality of supervision and project that emerges as the final product. Pearson and Brew (2002:135) point to concerns to improve research supervision effectiveness and quality in order to improve student satisfaction and timely completion rates through the use of extension programmes for supervision development. In agreement, Barnett (2000) stresses the importance of prudent research skills in a super-complex world.

WAYS IN WHICH SUPERVISION DEVELOPMENT HAS IMPACTED ON MY SUPERVISION

Phang et al (2014:252); Bitzer (2010:27); de Kleijn, Meijn, Brekelmans and Pilot (2014:117); Maritz and Prinsloo (2015:3); Mohammad (2014:37); and Lye

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(2004:130) believe that project completion and postgraduate success depend primarily on the quality of supervision given to the students. Mohammad further highlights the importance of developing curricula, supervisory practices and mentoring approaches to enhance postgraduate supervision. Farizah, Siti, Mohd, Muhammad, Mohd, Nor, Siti and Nooraini, (2015:95) caution against overlooking the fact that novice supervisors lack research and supervision experience and point to the dangers of expecting the new supervisors to “learn on the fly” (Maritz and Prinsloo, 2015) thus running into the same “research traps and pitfalls” (Lye, 2004) as their predecessors. Lee (2008:268) sees the extent of development of the concept of research supervision as crucial to the supervisor’s ability to navigate between a range of approaches to supervision, enhancing positive impacts and reducing negative impacts of each approach. Supervisors themselves, especially new ones, need to be supported and mentored and not left to make mistakes that were determined years ago and possible solutions identified.

My style of supervision continues to be shaped by other supervisors, both experienced and novice, who I met as I was going through my long lonely journey as a doctoral student as well as at workshops. I find such engagements to be crucial to my personal development as a novice supervisor. In many ways it is the provision of a developmental space and the opportunities to share experiences with colleagues that are the key merits of staff development initiatives, rather than the content of the course itself.

The lonely journey as a fairly isolated scholar that I experienced while undertaking my doctoral studies had some merits. It provided me with a strong sense of independence and an ability to structure my own project. I also had to learn not to allow myself to be derailed by distractions and to counter any debilitating negativity within myself. This experience comes in handy as I pinpoint possible derailment points to the students I supervise. There weren’t as many research workshops at the time as there are now within the faculty and my promoter was also a novice finding his way around the supervision maze without much support. The discussions that take place at the supervision workshops highlight my weaknesses and the weaknesses of others, and point the way towards becoming better at the job. It is interesting also to see experienced supervisors who may have become complacent learning from novices who are still very cautious and particular about this newly found field of expertise.

The course focus on social justice and inclusion made me question assumptions I might make about prospective students and their ability to cope with postgraduate education. In order to make the postgraduate learning space one in which the mysteries of the discipline are made accessible and open to critique, I have had to

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invest considerable thought as to how to make the space one that is welcoming to all and that acknowledges the multiple experiences my students bring with them. This has been a significant shift from thinking about postgraduate supervision in fairly functional ways (Lee 2007) where my primary objective has been to manage the supervision of the research project.

I also learnt about the importance of developing a student–supervisor agreement outlining the roles and responsibilities of each in order to prevent problems that might occur where such are not clarified beforehand. The norms and expectations that the student and supervisor bring to the process may differ considerably and may need significant open and collegial engagement in order to foster a shared sense of how to work together. I know about the value of keeping records of communication with the students, tracking their progress and proving needed support. Having a practical set of organisation skills is essential in a context such as mine where I have to manage large numbers of students, each with their own concerns. The training also highlighted the importance of turning students into scholars, whereby they are nurtured to ask relevant and critical questions. The focus on the student as a scholar, and novice member of the discipline, has entailed a significant shift for me as a supervisor. As a novice trying my best to become a good supervisor, I have learnt to ask relevant questions that help my students think carefully about the importance of their studies in their current and envisaged careers.

Another way in which being part of a development course assisted me was to expose me to various philosophies of supervising. The course and the subsequent portfolio that I had to submit compelled me to read literature on research supervision which I would otherwise not have done. Severinsson (2015:196) regards literature study on research supervision as useful to becoming an effective supervisor. For example, the ideas underpinning the “humanizing pedagogy” made me realise that I may be as vulnerable as the students are and made me consider the significance of social inclusion in the South African supervisory context. As a new supervisor I am increasingly aware of and sensitive to the ways in which different expectations and values, and prior learning experiences can play into the supervisory relationship. “Humanizing pedagogy” makes me rethink what I do as a supervisor and how as a fellow student I am undertaking a journey towards the discovery of knowledge alongside my students which changes and reshapes our mutual understanding (Khene, 2014:74). This relationship is feasible if I practise the “ontological vocation of being human first” (Bishop, 2014); being interested in each student and their progress (de Keijn et al, 2015:118) and applying the rule of treating others as one would like to be treated. Camangian (2014) talks about teaching as if your life depended on it, and

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I would like to advocate the same for supervision: agitating the students about the current self, treating the tension between that and the desired state of being through personal reflection, inspiration and transformation. The postgraduate students are in most cases adults with as much role conflict as the supervisor has to grapple with which requires some deep understanding and motivation from me as a supervisor while drawing a line between process facilitation and stepping over the line and 'walking for them' which I think I have done in some cases.

However, it is important to state that acquiring such insights and then implementing them in practice is not easy as this is a new role piled upon a series of pre-existing roles. Without development and support I would not be able to give names to what I do, nor understand why I do it. Maritz and Prinsloo (2015) talk of the capital that shapes the supervisor's process of becoming which is riddled with mistakes if the novice supervisor is left to their own devices to "understand the inherent rules" and roles without any form of institutional or collegial support.

My approach to supervision is thus strongly informed by staff development courses, readings and faculty support meetings. Such initiatives prepare one for this new, challenging and very important role by reducing the sense of "powerlessness and ineffectiveness" often experienced by the novice supervisor (Maritz and Prinsloo, 2015:2). My approach is increasingly adaptive as I gain confidence in myself as a supervisor and it changes with my own development and the evolving needs of each student and the stage of research that the student is at (Chappetta-Swanson and Watt, 2011:16; Kleijn et al., 2015), beginning with fairly extensive structure and guidance and later moving to more independence and a more critical emancipatory approach. Sometimes I find myself taking on students whose relationship with their supervisor has failed. Here, in particular, I need to be empathetic and flexible as we move forward together (Wisker and Robinson 2013).

Postgraduate research supervision, as I have discovered (Nothnagel, 2015:91), is a field of study in its own right that demands specific skills and therefore should not be entered into unprepared by novice supervisors who are not simply "always/already" (Manathunga and Goozee 2007). Lee (2008:267) argues that a supervisor can make or break a postgraduate student especially if she herself has not been confidently inducted into the new field with its own concepts, theories and methodologies. Postgraduate supervision is not just about understanding my own field (which is management and leadership), but also about mastering the field of postgraduate research supervision. My understanding of research education is to develop effective research supervisors who are able to select ready students with some time to dedicate to their studies, and prepare, guide, mentor and motivate

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them towards completion. Research education is also aimed at supporting novice supervisors in teaching their students to think critically about their field of study, apply the new language and skills of research to question existing and accepted knowledge, and help in the development of new knowledge.

CONCLUSION

There are a myriad processes involved in guiding a student through the process of completing a dissertation and becoming an independent researcher. These processes are not necessarily known to those doctoral graduates who by virtue of completion of their studies are simply expected to become supervisors. Finding their way through these processes can become a lengthy and troubled process, with great risk to the novice supervisor and to their students if there are no mechanisms put in place to fast track their progress. Over and above these processes, the new supervisors are often themselves only just beginning to find their feet in the relevant discipline while simultaneously adjusting to the new role of supervisor. This chapter highlights the importance of research support and supervision development for novice supervisors to reduce the number of mistakes that may prove to be very costly for the students and the university as a whole, and to give them a sense of collegial space for becoming the kind of supervisor they would like to be. Development for the newly graduated doctors should not be incidental. It should be structured and compulsory if postgraduate research supervision effectiveness and quality are important to the faculty and university and if both timeous completion and project quality are important. This chapter argues that supervisors who have been exposed to supervision literature and nurtured through a supervision development process are likely to be better supervisors than those who are supervising with a sense of isolation and reliant only on their own experiences of being supervised. Staff development to enhance supervision capacity reduces frustrations for both the novice supervisors and postgraduate students and provides opportunities to foster a notion of professional communities collaborating to nurture a postgraduate environment for the benefit of all.

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NURTURING AND INSPIRING ACROSS SUPERVISORY STYLES AND PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

Nationally and internationally there has been a shift in the expectations placed upon higher education institutions by their governments. On a national level, recent years have seen a significant shift in the narrative of government regarding the need for doctoral graduates and the growth of a knowledge economy. A number of reports have been commissioned recently by the governments of developed nations which examined the importance of the effect that the PhD has on the knowledge economy and the development of the country's competitiveness in a global context (Sainsbury, 2007). As a result of these reports, developed countries have recognised the value of and have invested in significantly increasing the number of PhD graduates in all subject fields and disciplines (Barnacle, 2005; Walker and Thomson, 2010). This reflects recognition of the value that highly skilled individuals can bring to society in general and to their subject fields specifically.

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) (ASSAf Report, 2010) recently commissioned its own report into the state of the PhD in the South African context, seeking to provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the status of the South African PhD. The major intended outcome was to provide advice to the government, rooted in concrete evidence, on how to increase the number and quality of PhD graduates, the levels of which have been shown to correlate with economic growth (King, 2004). The ASSAf consensus report highlights a number of critical areas which need to be addressed to increase the country's number of PhD graduates. These include that:

- the number of doctoral graduates in the natural and engineering sciences needs to be increased;

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- the apprenticeship model of supervision may need to be replaced with a more suitable model for increasing the number of PhD graduates; and
- there is limited supervisory capacity.

As McCallin and Nayar (2012) aptly state, “challenges facing students and supervisors are complicated in a context where fast supervision is important” (cited in Green and Usher, 2003:38). The supervisory context in South Africa is further complicated by the remnants of the effects of apartheid. For many, the lack of access to post-school education, let alone quality education, has led to a society marked by severe inequality. Today, the postgraduate cohort tends either to come from a financially secure background, with the ability to provide for good quality education, or from a financially disadvantaged background, where access to quality education is not possible. At the time of writing, recent months have seen student uprisings against the exclusionary nature of higher education, with student fees identified as the major hurdle to access to higher education. While high student fees are indeed exclusionary, poor secondary education is even more so.

These vast differences in the socio-economic background of prospective postgraduate students need to be considered throughout the supervisory process as, when faced with these issues, traditional methods of supervision may fall short. Thus, high attrition rates of postgraduate students in South Africa may in part be attributed to a lack of awareness of the socio-economic factors which impact on postgraduate learning.

A key requirement of overcoming the challenges faced by postgraduate supervisors, in the context of the prevailing socio-economic backgrounds of their students, is that they should be exposed to, and empowered by, knowledge about methods of supervision other than trial and error (Emilsson and Johnsson, 2007). However, often time constraints and high attrition rates of graduate students do not allow for the measured development of supervisors.

The importance of supervisor learning and development prior to the act of supervision is developed by Halse (2011), who proposes that training in the process of becoming a supervisor be formally offered as supervisor professional development. As an example, the EP-Nuffic and DHET funded programme *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* (SPS) is a formal training programme in supervision pedagogy which seeks to address supervisor learning prior to the responsibilities of full-blown supervision. A key goal of this programme is to enhance the quality of supervision through a process of self-reflection on the part of the supervisor.

The self-reflection that I engaged in as a result of my participation in the SPS has led to the development of an idealised supervisory model: nurturing and

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inspiring supervision. To appreciate the development of this model it is important to acknowledge the many inequities within the South African education context, and also to position my model relative to current models of supervision and their theoretical underpinnings. This is what this chapter seeks to achieve.

MODELS OF SUPERVISION

Three broad models of supervision have been described in the literature (Boud and Lee, 2005; Johnson, Lee and Green, 2000). These models, which will be reflected upon in this section are traditional one-on-one supervision, cohort or group supervision, and the blended learning model.

The first model is the traditional one-on-one model of supervision in which the supervisor-as-expert guides the student's learning by issuing and managing tasks designed to culminate in a thesis or dissertation and graduation. While this model is suited to students who are naturally independent, drawbacks become apparent when used for students who may have a greater need for guidance and direction. The varied exposure to quality education has resulted in some students who are independent in their learning and others who are not. Bearing this in mind, it is crucial for supervisors to devise strategies that foster independent learning. Neumann (2005) states that under the traditional model of supervision the lack of discussions with fellow students, due to the inherent isolation of the model, negatively affects and limits researcher capability development. The positive aspects of the traditional model are that mentoring, sponsoring and coaching still occur (McCallin and Nayar, 2012; Pearson and Kayrooz, 2004).

The second model of supervision has grown out of the desire to overcome the drawbacks associated with the traditional model. The cohort model or group supervision model introduces peer support, in the form of student-groups and supervisor-groups, which provide emotional and social support. Community learning is encouraged through writing groups and problem-solving seminars. While evidence suggests that these aspects improve the experience of the supervisory process (Buttery and Ruchter, 2005), some argue that scholarly development is neglected (Parker, 2009).

Finally, the hybrid model combines the traditional and cohort models of supervision, while utilising the environment and communities of people. In this manner individual sessions are combined with elements of a virtual classroom, such as teleconferences, discussion groups and self-paced online courses.

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As a novice supervisor, my experience has been that with one or two students the traditional model of supervision would appear to be the most appropriate to the supervisory situation. Even so, literature argues that alternative supervisory approaches should nevertheless be developed.

The three models of supervision described above are underpinned, to a greater or lesser extent, by five main approaches to supervision (Lee, 2008). At the most practical level is what Lee terms functional supervision, which is characterised by the active engagement of the supervisor to lead and assist the student to solve the research problem. Functional supervision is a key element of the traditional model of supervision. Another approach is enculturation, in which the supervisor-as-expert is reconfigured to incorporate or include many experts. Student learning is transitional in that the supervisor supports the student as he/she progresses from novice to expert. Critical thinking entails the supervisor 'inspiring' the student to develop their own voice and to reflect critically on their own work, facilitating the development of independent learning. The emancipatory approach symbolises the freedom of the student and the complete development of their own voice, while the relationship development approach is regarded as key to the development of the student, since the relationship can either be characterised by neglect, abandonment or indifference, or by careful instruction, and the positive and proactive exercise of power (Johnson et al., 2000). As a supervisor the ideal scenario would be to be able to navigate between the approaches, as necessary.

TOGETHERNESS: NURTURING AND INSPIRING SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS AND ENVIRONMENTS

Through my self-reflection on the complexities and challenges of supervision, a singular overarching theme has emerged: Togetherness can result in nurturing and inspiring supervision. The concept of togetherness is not new and has been reviewed in the literature, especially surrounding the perceived benefits of the cohort model of supervision. Nkoane (2013) and de Lange, Pillay and Chikovo (2011) have recently argued that the cohort model of supervision is good for creating a sustainable learning environment.

The sustainable learning environment, which is characterised by respect, emancipation and an environment in which students have their own voice, is intertwined with the notion of a nurturing and inspiring environment. The first step to developing students' voice is to provide a context in which they feel that any contribution they make to the supervisory process is appreciated. Initially, no idea is considered to be inadmissible but, where the thinking is flawed, this is pointed out in a manner which leaves the

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student feeling good about the interaction. This is much easier said than done, since personal factors such as the mood of the supervisor on a particular day and external pressures which they are coping with all impact on how they respond. Again, the need for constant awareness of what is said and how it is said, and its impact on the supervisory process, need to be considered continuously.

In particular, the sustainable learning environment removes the control inherent in traditional master-apprentice relationships. To create this environment requires a shift in the supervisory relationship. Supervisory relationships are either power-centred or facilitation-centred (Armitage, 2007; Rau, 2008). To create a sustainable or nurturing and inspiring learning environment, supervision should develop into a pedagogic relationship constituted by freedom and friendship which transforms and empowers (Waghid, 2006). A supervisory relationship should be built in which boundaries are negotiated and where each party earns legitimate, referent and expert power in the eyes of the other (Conti, Hewson and Isken, 2001). This implies that the supervisor cannot be aloof and unaffected by a student's personality traits and levels of the requisite skills, and should be aware of how their own expectations affect the student. This can only be achieved through hard work on the part of both supervisor and student, and a total commitment to the outcomes of the supervisory process.

Nkoane (2013) argues that once a new supervisory relationship has been established a platform is created for empowerment through freedom. The supervisory process then creates a movement away from the product in the direction of the process. Students are inspired to wonder, to imagine and to pose their own questions. They think about what they are doing and are provided with a platform to share their meanings and to conceptualise and interpret their data. This shift toward the learning process influences student learning not to reproduce the master's own knowledge but to construct their own. In the context of togetherness, the supervisor becomes co-constructor and co-learner.

On the other hand, it is important to consider the pitfalls which may arise while forging togetherness in postgraduate supervision. These pitfalls tie in with the inherent dependence many postgraduate students have upon their educators, lecturers and supervisors. Students who possess these character traits may find the notion of thinking, learning and doing for themselves to be completely alien and difficult to assimilate. Here, a clear understanding of the roles and expectations of supervisor and student is extremely important. This understanding should be facilitated by discussions which occur throughout the supervisory process, and not just at the beginning or at the end. Ultimately the togetherness needs to be understood by both

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parties as being beneficial to the supervisory process. When the supervisor is aware of the pitfalls and continuously works to remove them this togetherness has the ability to truly nurture and inspire students and produce graduates who are ready to add to the knowledge economy.

In the current context, where measurable outcomes are deemed important, de Lange (2011) found that the cohort model of supervision succeeds in creating the sustainable learning environment that I have described, and that the five elements of learning are positively reinforced.

In my opinion the novice supervisor is perfectly positioned to merge these positive elements of a cohort model into a traditional model of supervision. For this to succeed a supervisor needs to foster a community in which the supervisor and the student grow and learn together; and to put in place learning opportunities and management processes which empower the student.

The supervisory process can be process or problem oriented. Grant (2003) argues that a good supervisor has the ability to be both process and problem oriented. To which extent each of these opposing forces manifest themselves in the supervision relationship is dependent on the strengths and weaknesses of the student. Here the distinguishing feature is that process-oriented supervision is often associated with a more supportive environment in comparison with the problem-oriented approach. However, both these aspects of the supervisory process are two halves of a complex whole, and are key for the production of the thesis and the development of the student into an independent researcher (Hockey, 1994).

Hemer (2012) introduces an interesting concept in which the supervisory style and environment is understood as modulated by “third places”. Third places are characterised by an informality in which the inherent power relations in supervision are changed so as to build the supervisor-student relationship. Previous reports have sought to link a relaxed ambience with an improvement in the quality of supervision (Kam, 1997). The third place in question is a coffee shop, where supervision takes place over coffee. Hemer’s (2012) study found, based on interview data, that the introduction of a third place characterised by informality was beneficial to relationship development and eased some of the power issues associated with the supervisory process.

An important consideration which emerges around working with informality in supervision is the need to maintain boundaries. Tying in to the discussion above, supervision characterised by informality should ensure that the boundaries which are negotiated are not compromised by the desire of the supervisor to be informal for the

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perceived benefit of the relationship. Another concern which emerged on discussion of this approach with fellow novice supervisors is a certain level of anxiety associated with being informal. Often the claim is made that informality weakens the supervisor, particularly when issues in supervision need to be addressed or when feedback is provided to the student on progress made. What is clear from these discussions and the literature (Ives and Rowley, 2005; Hockey, 1995) is that the dynamics of the supervisor–student relationship and the degree of formality or informality should be managed, as is the case for all aspects of postgraduate supervision.

TOGETHERNESS: SUPERVISORY LEARNING AS PART OF THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

The previous discussion has focused on alternative learning environments and the factors which influence how a nurturing and inspiring environment can be created and sustained. An interesting concept which has emerged recently is that of supervisory learning. This is contrary to the way it has been assumed that supervisors learnt their trade, in so far as it was assumed that the ability to adequately supervise postgraduate students was learned by doctoral graduates on the job (Halse and Gearside, 2005; Halse and Malfroy, 2010). The movement to actively embrace supervisory learning is particularly relevant when considering the demands placed on supervisors to deliver well-rounded graduates with limited time to do so. Supervisor professional development has emerged as a strategy to teach supervisors what they need to know to be effective supervisors. Whether the knowledge gained can be effectively transmitted and implemented to the benefit of the supervisory process is an interesting question.

Halse (2011) recently examined, firstly, what supervisors learn from the work of supervising doctoral students, and, secondly, how supervisor learning comes about. These questions are pertinent since, contrary to past practices, the process of doctoral supervision is perceived to allow less time for self-discovery as the supervisor and for the development of critical thinking in students. In addition, these questions are particularly important in the context of the tension between quantity and quality of PhDs, where the need to deliver large numbers of PhDs turns the process into a conveyor belt.

The study by Halse (2011) identified a number of interesting skills which supervisors learnt during their supervisory work, one of which was the use of self-protective strategies. These typically include discouraging risk taking or time-consuming research methods or analyses; rewriting more than reviewing students' theses; and pre-empting late submissions by providing rationales in annual progress reports.

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Some may argue that these are valid ways of ensuring that the student generates a thesis which will pass national and international examination. I am of the opinion that these strategies erode the supervisory process and do not nurture or inspire. In the context of togetherness, these strategies may be considered to amount to functional supervision and, ultimately, they stifle higher-order skills, such as critical thinking and emancipation.

The self-protective supervisory strategies identified by Halse (2011) serve to isolate both the supervisor and the student, who becomes disempowered because he/she has no responsibility for the student-supervisor learning process. The end product is a research-as-a-business approach to supervision. This conclusion has been upheld in the course of conversations I have had on the topic with experienced supervisors. I find the approach described is contrary to my approach to supervision. It is questionable whether it is possible to be nurturing and inspiring when the emphasis is overwhelmingly on outputs. Halse's study illuminates a concern which I and other supervisors have that the expected skill set of the doctoral graduate is impaired and that the impairment will be revealed when they are no longer under the wing of the supervisor.

Another skill learnt by supervisors during supervision is disciplined supervision (Halse 2011). Strict constraints on feedback, reviewing and discussions are imposed by the supervisor on the student. The implication is that the student is a burden and that other matters are more important. This sends a clear message to the student: 'You are alone'. The supervisor's time is, by implication, important and time spent together with the student to learn, grow, and discover is inconsequential. The feeling of isolation and disempowerment experienced by the student is reinforced each time a contact session between supervisor and student is scheduled.

To avoid these demoralising scenarios supervisors need to know themselves and be aware of their weaknesses. This aspect of supervisory learning then allows a supervisor to consider the impact that their response and critique has on the student. To appreciate the student's sense of self requires a compromise of ego and power in which the student becomes empowered. Halse (2011) highlights the notion of 'supervisor sensitisation'. Knowing when to be supportive, provide guidance and direction and how to foster the sense of freedom are important skills for the supervisor to develop.

How and to what extent all of these goals are enacted is dependent on the current needs of the student. It becomes apparent that supervisory learning is an ongoing and always-evolving process. I think it is important to take stock; to make a point of

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evaluating what has been learnt; and the good and not-so-good on the journey of learning and discovery as a supervisor.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to place the concept of togetherness for nurturing and inspiring supervision into context among the current models and styles of postgraduate supervision. It becomes apparent that nurturing and inspiring supervision cannot be placed solely under any particular style or model of supervision. This is both the exciting and intimidating part of becoming a supervisor. I am of the opinion that postgraduate supervision requires continuous self-reflection. It requires considerations such as: Am I and my students still together in this relationship? Is the environment we have created still conducive for co-constructing and co-learning? Have I reverted to developing self-protective strategies? In addition, it requires the supervisor to acknowledge their shortcomings and weaknesses and to be able to accept and adjust to their students. The potential outcome of continuous self-reflection is a supervisory process characterised by togetherness.

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BROADENING THE SPOTLIGHT

USING THE *STRENGTHENING POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION* COURSE TO SHIFT INSTITUTIONAL THINKING

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers an alternative perspective to those of the individual reflections in the preceding chapters in this book. Essentially, it takes a step back, so that the lens can be extended to enable an institutional perspective. Earlier chapters in the book bear testimony to the potential of the *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* (SPS) programme to influence thinking and to change practice at the level of the individual. While these instances of transformative learning are to be celebrated and recognised as critical in challenging the status quo around postgraduate training, ultimately what is needed is that such thinking permeates across the system.

The fundamental assumption is that the rapidly changing and expanding higher education sector requires an institution-wide review of the ways in which postgraduate education is delivered and therefore also of the ways in which postgraduate supervision might be structured and supported. Such a review will require institution-wide shifts in thinking that complement and enable the individual learning that takes place during supervisory training programmes.

We believe that *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* is as much a matter of organisational development as it is a matter of individual development. The focus here is therefore on how best to initiate and manage change within the higher education context and the role that supervision development programmes could play in this regard. The central argument is that while individual supervisor training alone might not be enough to bring about the change that is needed, it does have the potential to act as catalyst for wider organisational change.

STRENGTHENING POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

This chapter presents a case from Stellenbosch University (SU), a medium-sized research university in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The authors were members of a small project team that brought the SPS course to SU. The team's explicit intention was to use the course as an impetus to start an organisational change process that would shift institutional thinking around postgraduate supervision. In critically reflecting on the team experience and that of the programme participants, it is intended to share the team insights into the potential of an individual intervention such as the SPS course to initiate change, as well as some initial insights regarding critical success factors for bringing about change in higher education contexts. The hope is that the lessons learned will contribute to shifting institutional thinking elsewhere.

CHANGES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

The last few decades have seen dramatic changes in the global context within which postgraduate education and supervision take place (Lee and Danby, 2012). According to Becher and Trowler (2001), the era of post-industrialism has been characterised by globalisation, massification, altered relations between higher education (HE) and the state, marketised relationships, managerialism within universities and substantive disciplinary growth. These macro trends have led, *inter alia*, to constraints in state funding for higher education; increased student numbers and student diversity; and a shift in the perceived purposes of higher education, with an increased focus on its vocational, economic, or labour market functions. This in turn is accompanied by increasing state intervention in the affairs of universities, as well as the increased influence of industry. Finally, as private industry and information technology become alternative knowledge providers, the power of the customer – students, employers and the government – has also increased (Becher and Trowler, 2001).

South African universities have not been immune to changes in the global context. Challenges particularly pertinent to South African higher education institutions (HEI's) include demands from government to deliver more doctoral graduates, increasing diversity and internationalisation, moves to inter- and cross-disciplinary research, and new modes of knowledge production (Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011), as well as the casualisation of postgraduate study through a large percentage of part-time, distance learning students (Mouton, 2011). In the South African context, the changing student and staff demographics play a particularly important role as HEI's still struggle to provide equitable and supported access to students from groups excluded during apartheid. In addition, the pressure for efficiency has increased through a government funding model that explicitly incentivises postgraduate throughput and

output in line with ambitious targets for increasing doctoral graduates (Mouton, 2011). While there is general agreement on the benefits of doctoral graduates for the South African economy and society, Mouton (2011) argues that these targets are unrealistic for two main reasons. First, the existing undergraduate pipeline that feeds the postgraduate pool is simply too small and, second, there is a shortage of the qualified supervisors needed to expand postgraduate output.

CURRENT AND EMERGING PRACTICES OF POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

The dominant model of postgraduate research education in South African universities remains an apprenticeship “learning-by-doing” model (Backhouse, 2007:1) characterised by an “individualised and personal” dyadic relationship between the supervisor and the research student (ASSAf, 2010:65). Elsewhere, Manathunga (2005:18) notes that supervision has traditionally been regarded by academics as “a private space”, free from outside scrutiny. This seems to be true also for the South African context. As Backhouse (2007:2) argues, this “critical relationship has been left to individual supervisors and students to interpret and play out”, leading to different views on the doctoral process and the respective roles of the supervisor and student involved.

Changes in the higher education context described above have led to the appropriateness of this model of postgraduate education being questioned. A study by the Academy of Science for South Africa (ASSAf) on the state of doctoral education in South Africa highlights three emerging alternatives to the traditional model, namely course-based programmes, cohort-based models and the PhD by publication (ASSAf, 2010). Various authors emphasise different drivers for these trends, including concerns for efficiency, and transparency or transformation, as well as more pedagogical considerations. For example, the ASSAf (2010:65) report found that “the traditional approach – being based on the availability of suitably qualified supervisors – serves a relatively small number of students and may not be an efficient model for rapidly increasing PhD production”. Others suggest exploring alternative models of supervision in order to “open out and make transparent the largely private relationship” (Samuel and Vithal, 2011:83).

Mouton (2011) argues that change should also be driven by quality concerns, rather than only focusing on the increased efficiency of doctoral production. He describes a move away from a *laissez faire* style of doctoral supervision towards a more structured and directed process, with strict screening, monitoring, coursework, and assessment, often by departmental committees, throughout the doctoral process. This thinking may be linked to a fairly recent phenomenon worldwide of a “move

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to pedagogy" (Lee and Danby, 2012:4) and the explicit consideration of skill and knowledge development in doctoral education.

McAlpine et al. (2012:521) highlight the role of the institution (as opposed to that of the individual supervisor) in postgraduate education. In a study of doctoral candidates in the UK and Canada, they find that a lack of student progress is often explained through a convenient narrative of the "student not measuring up". They argue that "the invisibility with which students feel they must deal with ... regular problems" – be they personal, professional, or academic – "maintains the apparent marginality of these experiences to the doctoral journey and thus renders the institution absolved of the responsibility to create policy measures to deal with [them]". They agree with Barnes and Austin's comment that "doctoral advising is woefully uneven" (Barnes and Austin, 2009, cited in McAlpine et al., 2012:521) and suggest that it will remain so, unless we understand and also contextualise the difficulties experienced and acted upon by doctoral students.

Elsewhere, McAlpine (2013) concludes from a longitudinal study across the same UK and Canadian institutions that supervisors, while important, are not paramount to the doctoral journey, and that doctoral students learn largely from engaging in doctoral work and through drawing on complex networks. Given this, she argues that institutions should provide "structural pedagogies" (p. 265) which aim for consistent transparent support for supervisors and students, taking into account the unique backgrounds and social capital that different students carry into the educational environment.

McAlpine's insights might be particularly pertinent to the South African situation, given the increase in diversity of students, their backgrounds, and contexts. Indeed, from a small study of PhD students' experiences of supervision at a South African university, Backhouse (2007:7) concludes that it is problematic that "the individual supervisor looms too large in the life of the student". Referring to Boud and Lee's vision of doctoral students "as self-organising agents of varying effectiveness, accessing resources, one of which is the supervisor" (Boud and Lee, 2005, cited in Backhouse, 2007:7), Backhouse concludes that doctoral students should be provided with an environment in which they can interact with a wide range of resources that include other students, other members of academic staff, and co-supervisors. This implies a much broader understanding of supervision than that of an individual relationship with one supervisor, working in isolation.

Lee and Green (2009:616) remind us that "despite growing recognition that doctoral education is a 'shared responsibility' among many participants, there is a persistent administrative and conceptual defaulting to the one-to-one relationship".

Backhouse (2010:3) also indicates that while there are varying “patterns of practice” in South African supervision, most remain variants of a highly individualised model. Assuming then that more needs to be done to enhance postgraduate education and supervision in the changing context described above, the question asked in this chapter is how best such changes could be introduced and managed in HEIs. In particular, we ask whether supervisor training has a role to play in this regard. Before moving on to these questions, it is useful to look at the current state of supervisor training and support in South Africa.

CURRENT SUPERVISOR TRAINING

In South Africa, “it is assumed that once an individual has a PhD, they are qualified to supervise the PhD and there is little training or induction of new supervisors and virtually no assessment of supervision skills” (Dietz et al., 2006, cited in Backhouse, 2007:2). Instead, supervision practices are often based on the individual’s own experience of being supervised, constituting what Dietz et al. (2006) term the “reproductive character of research supervision” (cited in Backhouse, 2007:2). There is no nationally prescribed supervision course that all supervisors have to undergo before they may supervise. Apart from national workshops and conferences, supervision training has therefore been largely left to individual institutions, mostly through their research divisions (Bitzer, 2010).

The situation regarding supervisor training can be partly explained by the fact that traditionally supervision has been conceptually construed as “research” rather than “education” or “teaching” (Lee and Green, 2009:616) and that, therefore, educational development for research supervisors remains a recent phenomenon worldwide. However, as Manathunga (2005) notes, recent demands from governments, postgraduate research students, graduates, and university managements have led to comprehensive – and in some cases mandatory – supervision development programmes being broadly taken up in the UK, continental Europe, and Australasia. Manathunga links these moves, in Australia at least, to the government’s “renewed quality agenda”, which has led to increasing government intervention in all aspects of university operation, including the provision of educational development for supervisors.

The situation in South Africa is not as prescriptive as it has become elsewhere. While there is some reference to supervisor development in the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) standards, it does not have the status of policy or strategy. Mouton, speaking at a workshop convened by South Africa’s National Research Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York in October 2013, argues

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that the focus of the South African government policy and strategy has been almost exclusively on the quantitative goals (such as increased outputs and throughputs), while quality is assumed to be taken care of through the existing quality assurance processes of institutions, audited by the HEQC (reported in MacGregor, 2013).

With regard to postgraduate supervision, the HEQC stipulate the following criteria as minimum standards for postgraduate programme accreditation:

The supervisor has a qualification in a relevant field of study higher than, or at least at the same level as, the exit level of the postgraduate programme he/she is supervising; the supervisor has an appropriate research track record, as well as experience, expertise and peer recognition in the field of study; in the case of inexperienced or new supervisors, there is on-going staff development and support and joint supervision is explored as an option (HEQC, 2004:14).

The standard by which the criteria above are to be measured is that they “must be acceptable to the research community in the area of study” (HEQC, 2004:14).

In the Australian context, Manathunga (2005:17) shows how the perceived intrusion by government into what many supervisors regard as a “private pedagogical space” has meant that the rise in supervision development has not necessarily been welcomed. This is especially true where programmes have an administrative focus or a reductionist technical training slant that “deny the genuine difficulties and complexities involved in supervision relationships” or where administrative staff, who may not understand disciplinary cultures and values, are expected to run the programmes (Manathunga, 2005:17).

As an antidote to this, Manathunga (2005) argues for a reflective practice approach to supervisor development, which values and draws upon supervisors’ implicit, local knowledge about supervision and allows them to engage with the genuine dilemmas and complexities of supervising students. However, she suggests combining reflection with “a critical edge” to prevent it from merely reinforcing the status quo. This involves deliberately and consistently surfacing and examining the underlying assumptions of what emerges during reflection.

THE SPS COURSE

Given the context described above, the SPS course represents a unique opportunity to strengthen postgraduate supervision across South African institutions. In its national roll-out, the SPS course is possibly the largest co-ordinated supervision development intervention South Africa has seen to date. The stated aims of the SPS course are to develop a growing pool of reflective supervisor practitioners (SPS, 2015), and its methodology avoids the technical training slant of the kinds of

workshops Manathunga (2005) refers to by drawing on the experiences and implicit knowledge of practising supervisors.

It is significant that the biggest single co-ordinated response to growing levels of concern about the changing nature of postgraduate education and changing expectations regarding supervision in South Africa has come from academics themselves. The fact that the course was developed and is being delivered through the collaboration of five South African universities, with the backing of international institutions, gives it a momentum not experienced before. This momentum could lead to the intervention contributing to future government policy in this regard, thereby possibly avoiding the trajectory followed by other countries, where supervision training has been driven by more managerialist agendas.

The question that remains, however, is how a course such as the SPS, that targets individual supervisors, could be used to drive the larger structural and institution-wide changes needed to truly transform and strengthen South Africa's postgraduate education capacity. For example, how can a course be used as a basis for starting conversations within departments and research groups about supervision? And further, how can one extend such discussions beyond group reflections about individual supervisory practices to an explicit consideration of departmental processes and structures that might need to be changed and adapted? Finally, can a training course focused on individual supervisor practices be used as an opportunity to consider postgraduate education more broadly, and to initiate changes at the institution level by shifting the focus away from the individual supervisor to the role of the institution? To answer these questions, we need to understand theories of change and how they may apply to the HE context and to supervision.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Maassen and Potman (1990:396) describe HEIs as unique versions of what is known in organisational science as "professional bureaucracies". Referring to van Vught (1989), they identify the following salient features that distinguish HEIs from business organisations:

- Knowledge areas form the basic foci of attention inside HEIs;
- The organizational structure of HEIs is heavily fragmented;
- The decision making power is extremely diffuse in HEIs; and
- Inside their pigeonholes HEIs are very innovative and adaptive; although most innovations are incremental (Maassen and Potman, 1990:397).

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Professional bureaucracies are unique because they are democratic, they disseminate their power directly to their professional workers and they provide them with extensive autonomy. As the last point above implies, the advantage for HEIs of this type of organisation is that there is freedom for continuous disciplinary discovery and innovation. However, this structure may create a problem for these organisations when conditions that enabled their existence in the first place change significantly.

Mintzberg (1983) cited in Maassen and Potman (1990:396-397) identifies three interrelated problems found in professional bureaucracies that need to be taken into account when considering organisation-wide change. First, they “are not integrated entities” but “collections of individuals who come together to draw on common resources and support services but otherwise want to be left alone”. This can lead to a lack of co-ordination between the professionals and support staff, but also to a lack of communication between professionals themselves. Second, the problem with the extensive autonomy in a professional bureaucracy is that it “not only enables some professionals to ignore the needs of their clients; it also encourages many of them to ignore the needs of the organization ... [t]hey are loyal to their profession, not to the place where they happen to practice it”. The third problem relates to the inflexible structure of a professional bureaucracy. Professionals operate from the perspective of their own specialisms and they are reluctant to work cooperatively (Mintzberg, 1983, cited in Maassen and Potman, 1990:396-397).

THEORIES OF CHANGE

In analysing our intervention from the perspective of initiating organisational change, we rely mainly on three works – namely, Kotter (1995), Trowler et al. (2005), and McAlpine (2013). The language of Kotter (1995), a well-known change management author in the field of management science, strongly invokes the world of big business and suggests deliberate, linear change strategies driven from the top of an organisational hierarchy. While his work might therefore not be fully reflective of how change processes should be managed within the higher education sector, it does offer a useful framework for understanding change processes themselves. Trowler et al. (2005), on the other hand, apply a social practice theory of change specifically to a higher education context, making their work particularly pertinent to our analysis, even though their focus is on changing teaching practices and not on supervisory practices.

Finally, McAlpine’s article (2013) is less explicitly concerned with organisational change theory, but her work is strongly focused on research supervision within changing higher education contexts. Based on her longitudinal research on the experiences of

doctoral candidates and new supervisors, she makes recommendations for changing the way in which supervision could be structured and supported within institutions.

CREATING INSTITUTIONAL MOMENTUM – KOTTER

Kotter (1995) identifies eight key phases that change processes need to go through if they are to succeed. These are summarised in Figure 10. It is always tricky, even “perilous”, according to Maassen and Potman (1990:398), to apply business frameworks or instruments to higher education contexts. Because of the features of professional bureaucracies described above, a number of implied aspects in Kotter’s framework do not apply to HEIs.

Eight steps for transforming organisations	
1.	Establish a sense of urgency
2.	Form a powerful guiding coalition
3.	Create a vision
4.	Communicate the vision
5.	Empower others to act on vision
6.	Plan for and create short-term wins
7.	Consolidate improvement and produce more change
8.	Institutionalise new approaches

FIGURE 10 Eight Steps for transforming organisations (Adapted from Kotter, 1995:61)

Strategic planning in HEIs is unlikely to be of the deliberate, linear type described by Kotter. When Kotter therefore urges organisational leaders to communicate the benefits and opportunities created by proposed changes, he implies that the needs of the organisation and the individual worker are aligned, and that they might agree on the potential benefits of change. In academic departments, however, external market forces, customer needs, or the priorities of the political economy are probably less likely to drive change than are discipline-based peer-supported knowledge trends. Even as university management becomes increasingly concerned with external drivers, the diffusion of power and decision making in HEIs means that management-initiated change is not necessarily welcomed or enforceable, as Manathunga’s (2005) work also showed. The same observations can be made for creating and communicating a vision. In his description of these phases, Kotter implies that there is a power and decision-making hierarchy and an equivalent flow of information from management levels to workgroups. Also, the formation of a “guiding coalition” (Step 2) needs to take into account the heavily fragmented nature of HEIs, as described earlier.

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Despite these concerns regarding the enactment of Kotter's steps within a HEI context, they offer a useful framework for understanding the typical sequence of and prerequisites for large-scale organisational change and therefore for guiding those involved in such processes. For example, the framework highlights the fact that change relies on a succession of actions over time, and will only be secure once the changed behaviours are embedded in the daily practices of the institution.

Another aspect of change highlighted by Kotter is that it relies on co-operation and some form of communal goal setting. This confirms Mintzberg's (1983) comments (referred to above) on the problems of bringing about change in professional bureaucracies. One may predict from this that managing change processes at higher levels across HEIs will have particular challenges, especially if structural changes are required.

What emerges most strongly from Kotter's work on the nature of change, however, is the momentum and energy that is required to combat the forces of stability and complacency. His eight steps read like a call to arms for a succession of onslaughts against the powers that are vested in maintaining the status quo. These are not necessarily deliberate or conscious forces, as is suggested by a social practice theory of change discussed below.

SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORIES – TROWLER ET AL. AND MCALPINE

Following Trowler et al.'s (2005) social practice theory, forces that hamper change may be embedded in entities such as the recurrent practices, assumptions, and tacit theories that operate within workplace or departmental 'regimes'. These regimes impinge on how changes are thought about, brought about, or implemented. In particular, the authors warn against assuming that individuals will be change agents, and against the assumption that developing reflective practitioners through training courses will necessarily allow individuals to bring their new perspectives and approaches back to their departments. Writing particularly about changing teaching and learning practices in higher education, they argue that it is at the departmental level that teaching and learning practices occur, that it is there that students and academics meet, and that it is therefore at the departmental level that such regimes are created. From this they argue that any attempts to change teaching and learning practices need to strongly focus on the departmental level, rather than only on the individual practitioner or on macro-level policies and strategies.

The question now arises whether this is true for changing supervisory practices across an institution. As has been argued above, individualised one-to-one supervision remains the norm in South Africa. This could arguably mean the absence of

supervision regimes and indicate that individual supervisor training is indeed the only level of intervention possible to improve and strengthen postgraduate supervision. Another perspective, however, and one which we would like to argue, is that the very individualistic nature of supervision is in itself the result of implicit assumptions about postgraduate education and what supervision should be, and that it is therefore the result of a supervision regime. This would partly explain the “persistent administrative and conceptual defaulting to the one-to-one relationship” model of supervision, despite increasing awareness of alternative approaches to supervision (Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011, 877-878, paraphrasing Lee and Green, 2009).

Trowler et al. (2005:440) suggest that changes in practices – teaching and learning in their case, and supervision in ours – can be facilitated through creating “reflexive departments”. According to them, a reflexive department is one which:

- is conscious of its regime, in that it has surfaced implicit theories, is conscious of recurrent practices, and has an awareness of its specific regime character;
- collectively evaluates how it operates as a department and how its particular regime influences it, and works to improve these operations; and
- makes changes in its practice to encourage enhancement of practices.

McAlpine (2013:265) also argues that supervisor training aimed at individual supervisors would “limit the potential for structural institutional change”. She suggests that supervisory development should be offered “within a departmental or program context” and be based on a “collective curricular review of policies and practices of supervision” (p. 266). Institutions themselves should therefore take collective responsibility for doctoral learning, based on the understanding that such learning is strongly dependent on the ability of the student to engage with doctoral work through not just a relationship with a supervisor but with a much wider network.

We have seen that changes in higher education have increased the complexity of postgraduate learning and supervisory processes (Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011). A focus on individual supervisor training in this context could easily be interpreted as holding supervisors solely responsible for responding to these challenges. In addition, it might be misguided, according to Trowler et al.’s reasoning, to assume that change can be effected through creating a pool of reflective practitioners. While, on the one hand, HEIs may need to guard against increasing managerialism, they also need to consider more far-reaching changes than improving current supervision practices within current structures. This may include structural changes to support supervisors and postgraduate students within current supervision modes, but it may also include changes to the very structure of delivering postgraduate education.

STRENGTHENING POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

What we therefore argue is that supervisor development focused on creating individual reflective practitioners is not sufficient to bring about the larger changes required within the South African context. However, as we hope to show with our case study of bringing the SPS course to Stellenbosch University, such a development programme can be a catalyst for wider organisational change.

THE INTERVENTION

The first *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* (SPS) course was hosted at SU in the first quarter of 2015, organised by a cross-divisional project team, with funding from the Department of Higher Education (DHET) Teaching Development Grant, awarded to SU as part of its approved three-year Teaching Development Plan. The team consists of three people: the Senior Director of Research and Innovation at SU, the head of the university's postgraduate skills development programme and an academic development practitioner employed within one of the ten faculties at SU, who was also SU's representative on the national SPS project team. The latter two members of the group are also the authors of this chapter. A strength of the team was that, through its members, it had both a faculty link and an institutional remit for postgraduate studies and supervisor support.

FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

About four months before the start of the course, the working group asked each of the ten faculty deans at SU to nominate participants to attend the first SPS course. We shared our intention of creating 'champions' – academics who would be able to provide facilitation of the same course in the future within each faculty and to pave the way for academics at SU to become more involved in studies on the pedagogy of postgraduate supervision. We felt that it would be ideal if each faculty could nominate a combination of participants that included more senior supervisors as well as early career supervisors. The former would have experience of and insights into faculty practices and could lend authority to any initiatives that might flow from the course; the latter would perhaps be well placed to drive faculty initiatives in the longer term, besides benefiting from the course in terms of their own development.

In order to ensure that the course would indeed be an impetus for localised development activities to strengthen postgraduate supervision, we agreed with the deans that participants would be given an opportunity during the course to explicitly consider how supervision could be strengthened within their local contexts. Our plan was to adapt the SPS course by adding a half-day participatory workshop session with the participants on the last day. We also agreed that the ideas and

insights generated during this session would be written down and given back to the deans as a discussion document that could form the basis for a future faculty plan. In our discussions with the deans, we had the impression that they welcomed the initiative. While some had a higher sense of urgency around the matter, they all felt that there was a need to improve and support postgraduate supervision within their environments.

IMPLEMENTATION

The time commitment required to complete the SPS course meant that the candidates initially nominated were not necessarily available, but in the end all ten faculties were represented by at least one participant. The 25 participants ranged from very new supervisors (<1 year's experience) to very experienced supervisors (>20 years' experience). Interestingly, it became clear on the first day of the course that the aim of the course might have been understood differently by the various deans, or perhaps that the communication from the dean's office to the individual participants might have obscured the message. Many of the participants were only vaguely aware of our intentions with the course; others were expecting a formal train-the-trainer course in which they would be taught facilitation skills; yet others had been given strict instructions to evaluate the course and provide feedback to the deans.

We had in fact communicated individually with each of the participants via email, but in retrospect we could have done more to ensure that everyone understood our intentions. While our discussions with deans were important to initiate the process, it would have been better to follow up these conversations within departments. This might also have encouraged more support from the departments for getting time off from teaching duties to attend the course. Nevertheless, we managed to brief the participants on the first day and all were happy to continue with the course as we had planned. The course was run as a standard SPS course, consisting of 3 days in January 2015 and an eight-week on-line phase, followed by 2.5 days in April 2015.

A PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP

As planned, the last half day of the workshop consisted of a facilitated session during which participants had to consider the following two questions:

- What are the key challenges related to postgraduate supervision and postgraduate education in your context?
- What interventions would make the most difference to postgraduate supervision and postgraduate education in your context?

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After two rounds of small group and then plenary discussions, participants were asked to write down their answers to the two questions in relation to their own faculty. Participants were made aware that these responses would be taken back to the deans of their respective faculties as starting points for further discussions and interventions to strengthen supervision at faculty level. Where there was more than one person from a faculty, they worked together, so that in the end we had ten response sheets, one from each faculty.

AFTER THE COURSE

After the course, we collected the response sheets, had them typed up and sent them back to the participants for checking and edits were made where requested.

At the time of writing, we had just started our follow-up sessions with the deans, during which we shared with them the individual faculty response sheets as well as the collated responses from all the faculties, the main themes from which are summarised below. We do not share the separate faculty responses here, since the intention at this stage is not to make a comparison between the faculties. Also, because of the way that the group discussion was structured, there was considerable convergence of ideas and therefore the differences between faculties were not significant. We are also mindful of the ethical considerations when describing an institutional intervention and do not want to identify individuals or individual faculties here. Even so, all the participants have been contacted and asked for written permission to share this collated response sheet, which they all provided. We also obtained permission from the Division of Institutional Planning to publish our portrayal of the process so far.

The collated participant responses were created through a process of thematic content analysis (Saldana, 2013). This was done separately by the two researchers to independently pinpoint emerging themes arising from the participant responses. These themes were then compared and, where necessary, combined or adapted.

THEMES FROM THE INTERVENTION RESPONSES

The six themes that emerged from the collated participant responses given to the two structured questions on the last day of the SPS course were a need for:

- Support for new supervisors
- A clear policy framework and/or explicit departmental processes and practices
- Enabling conversations
- Closer review with regard to workload and/or responsibilities of supervisors

- A focus on student concerns with regard to supervision and/or support for students
- Focus at both faculty and department level

A discussion and analysis of these responses follow in the next section.

A CRITICAL REFLECTION

Momentum, guiding coalitions, vision, communication

The process we have followed so far probably represents the first two to three of Kotter's eight phases. While it is therefore still too early to judge what the impact of this intervention will be, we can already identify some successes that could be explained on the basis of Kotter's framework and other theories of change. We have also become aware of some aspects we might have neglected and of where we lost some of the momentum required by our change effort.

Kotter (1995:60) acknowledges that change is much easier when the objective conditions themselves create a "sense of urgency". In our case the combined experience of a high demand for supervisor training, uncertainty about future consistent funding for training and the fragmentation of support services, which made co-ordination difficult, created the impetus for the formation of our cross-divisional project team, the members of which had become aware of the need to tackle things differently. From our first round of meetings with the deans we also sensed that they had an awareness of the increasing challenges and demands faced by supervisors and that it required some response.

The formation of the project team itself represents a 'powerful guiding coalition' (viz. Kotter's second step), not necessarily because we initially had that much power within the institution, but rather because we had brought together various perspectives and resources, and were therefore able to engage with broader questions than previous fragmented approaches to training or development had allowed. The most senior member of our team, the Senior Director of Research and Innovation, was instrumental in getting the faculty deans involved, which in turn lent to the course the authority that probably contributed to the high levels of involvement and commitment we saw during the creation of the participant feedback. Kotter (1995) also argues that the guiding coalition should include some people that operate outside of normal hierarchies, as this allows for greater experimentation outside normal protocols and expectations. This again, felt true of our coalition, as our project team members worked alongside faculties but not within them.

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There is however more we could do now in terms of creating a stronger guiding coalition. Kotter (1995:62) warns that it is not enough to just get “buy-in from senior management”, but that what is needed is for top people to come together and develop a shared commitment to improving through renewal. One possibility might be to get two or more deans or vice deans to join our project team. However, it would probably be more realistic to tackle each faculty as a separate ‘institution’, and help to set up individual faculty-guiding coalitions, with the participants in the first SPS course as members.

The way in which participants were nominated by the deans, and the way in which the course was framed for the participants, went some way towards “creating a vision” for the change process (viz. Kotter’s third step). However, it became apparent that our vision had not been clearly formulated or communicated at various stages in the process – within the working group, in our discussions with the deans, and in the deans’ communication with the participants. Part of this can be ascribed to the fact that our vision as a project team was very emergent. Even as we were visiting the deans with our initial plans, new possibilities arose, which we would then take into our discussions with the next dean. More intentionally, we never considered prescribing what actual changes in departmental practices should look like, but had intended for these to emerge from the discussions we hoped would follow the introduction of the SPS course. Even so, it would have been better if we had ensured, through better communication, a continued common understanding of what we were trying to achieve. A possible next step for us would be to get each of the faculty coalition groups to formulate their own vision around the creation of reflexive departments.

Reflexive departments

Trowler et al.’s (2005:441) description of reflexive departments actually comes quite close to what we were trying to achieve through our participatory workshop on the last day of the SPS course. However, while we were on the right track in trying to extend reflections beyond individual practices, our level of analysis was probably too high. Focusing initially on faculty level was important because, as Trowler et al. say (2005:436), departmental regimes are conditioned by the policies and structures of their context. However, it is not here that actual supervision practices and interactions take place and as such it cannot be the focus of any desired changes in supervision practice.

Faculty-level discussions do not lend themselves to reflection on practices, which is something which, in retrospect, participants articulated when they were trying to

formulate responses to our questions. In fact, partway through the discussion, we had changed the question from “practices in your faculty” to “practices in your context”. Nevertheless, because the responses were formulated as feedback to faculty deans, they do represent a communication to the faculty about some faculty characteristics. However, they contain a mixture of critical reflections, on the one hand, and requests for better structural conditions, on the other. This is something that might need to be clearly separated in the discussions going forward.

A next step in our process could be to consider which processes should continue at a faculty level, more along the lines of Kotter’s process, and which need to move to a department or workgroup level. The two processes would not run completely separately because, as Trowler et al. (2005) suggest, departmental reflexivity can be stimulated by participation in a larger faculty context. A more appropriate role for the deans from now on could therefore be to find ways in which departments will be requested to report on practices, and have as a requirement an explicit evaluation of their supervision models, supervisory practices and how the research environment is set up to encourage postgraduate pedagogy through an increased commitment to critical engagement of the students with the environment as a whole. Another aspect that needs to be included going forward is postgraduate student participation, in both the formation of a guiding coalition and in setting up of reflexive departments.

Participant responses

Our analysis of the participant responses confirms and gives content to the need for reflexive departments in enhancing supervisory practices. From a study of the experiences of new supervisors, McAlpine (2013:265) concludes that “by and large, new supervisors wanted more local community, more collegiality and had expected more collegial interactions that would foster their intellectual energy”. This is remarkably similar to what our participant responses revealed. Supervisors wanted to have more interaction with their colleagues, not only to share supervisory experience and expertise but also to know more about one another’s strengths or areas of interest. This may be one of the tensions unique to academic life – people want collegiality but also the autonomy provided by Mintzberg’s “professional bureaucracy” (1983, cited in Maassen and Potman, 1990:396-397). Trowler et al.’s (2005:441) “reflexive departments” and McAlpine’s (2013:265) “collective curricular review of the policies and practices of supervision” at departmental level both seem like good ways to deal with this tension.

Equally similar to our participants’ responses was the need McAlpine (2013:265) found “to know how things work at their institution, what the rules and norms are”.

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During the facilitated discussion on the last day of the course, we were struck by the high level of uncertainty and frustration at the lack of information supervisors experienced in their daily tasks. Whilst it is acknowledged that rules and norms are not always explicitly formulated, written down and readily available, calls by new supervisors for certainty, answers and policies might also indicate a lack of awareness of the complexities of postgraduate pedagogy, or simply a lack of awareness of systems already in place. At the same time, this does not absolve institutions of their responsibility for providing consistent and transparent support for all students and supervisors. One way out of this conundrum is what McAlpine (2013:265) calls a “collective curricular review” of the policies and practices of supervision within departments. She also calls for departmental supervisory discussions to “compare views of the purposes of the degree, frequency of meeting students, and how departmental oversight is structured”. According to her, “this will surface inaccurate understandings of policies, conflicting views of supervisor roles and diverse beliefs about the criteria for assessments” and provide the basis for further curricular conversations aimed at creating consistent collective practices to support all students (p. 266).

This is indeed where SU might be heading with its SPS process. McAlpine’s approach fits in with the shift that is being encouraged away from supervisor training courses to organisational departmental supervision development through opportunities for discussion and change. The SPS course itself can form the vehicle for surfacing individual understandings of postgraduate supervision and postgraduate pedagogy which, when shared in departmental settings, could lead to further curricular conversations and an evaluation of departmental practices. During the first course we kick-started the discussion around structures and practices at quite a high level, in faculties. We have learned from this intervention that perhaps for our initial level of analysis, namely change at faculty level, it might have been appropriate to consider structural changes, but that a more appropriate level for considering change in supervisory practices would be the change at the departmental level.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we posed the question whether a supervision course such as SPS, which aims to shift the thinking of individual supervisors, could contribute to bringing about changes in supervision practices across a higher education institution, as necessitated by recent changes in higher education.

Following Trowler et al.’s interpretation of a social practice theory of change (2005), we argued that current supervisory practices are likely to be located in strong

“supervisory regimes” that mediate the efforts of individual (even critical) reflective practitioners to change their supervision practices. While we found support in the ‘classic’ change management literature (e.g. Kotter, 1995) for the possibility of co-ordinating and driving change from an institutional management level, we argued that HEIs as “professional bureaucracies” (Maassen and Potman (1990:396), are more likely to benefit from a focus on the departmental level, which is where actual supervision practices and interactions take place. Linking back to Trowler et al. (2005), we offered the possibility of reflexive departments – as alternative to reflexive individuals – as drivers for change, within a supportive institutional and faculty policy environment. We drew links between this view and authors such as McAlpine (2012, 2013), Backhouse (2007) and Boud and Lee (2005) who also highlight the role of the institution (in addition to that of the supervisor) in postgraduate education.

The above arguments were borne out in our case study – both in the analysis of the process that was followed in introducing the SPS course at SU and in the analysis of the responses of participants on the course. Regarding the process, we found that working with the deans of faculties created a momentum that encouraged participation in the programme, but that in the context of postgraduate supervision, key aspects of the change process needed to recognise the realities, constraints and possibilities of daily work at departmental level. Regarding the participant responses, we found that supervisors raised a range of issues which were not necessarily within the power of individuals to address or change. In particular, they expressed a need for more explicit formulation of the collective practices that affect both supervisors and postgraduate students. These ranged from student support, to admission, to work divisions, to the various research interests of colleagues. While participants formulated these as requests for policy and answers “from above”, our analysis suggested that these could better be developed through collective curricular review.

Given the institutional interest in shifting thinking, reflective departments that engage in this kind of curricular review could both act as vehicles of change and as responses to the needs identified by supervisors. We conclude that, while an intervention that is focused on individual supervisor development has the potential for opening up conversations around supervision, the most appropriate change process for developing supervision is one that focuses on the level of the department, which is where the daily practices of supervision and postgraduate education are enacted.

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